

Home remedy for skin cancer may cause damage, mask new growth

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(HealthDay)—Despite the promise of an "easy and natural" treatment

for skin cancer, home remedies such as black salve can actually make things worse, new research shows.

People use black salve with the hope that it will remove skin cancers. But, this purported therapy contains corrosive ingredients that can destroy the skin's top layer while cancer continues to grow underneath, the researchers explained.

"There is a misperception that black salve 'draws the cancer out,' when, in fact, it just indiscriminately damages anything it touches," study co-author Dr. Mark Eliason, a dermatologist at the University of Utah, said in a news release from the American Academy of Dermatology. "One of the reasons black salve treatment is so dangerous is that many users have no idea how harmful it can be."

For the study, the researchers interviewed people who used black salve. They found that 74 percent of these patients were unaware the possible side effects of the remedy, including infection, scarring and disfigurement.

Complicating matters, using black salve can delay the detection and treatment of [skin cancer](#). This could give the cancer a chance to spread, making it more difficult to treat, the researchers noted.

"If you see something on your skin that looks suspicious or is different from other spots on your skin, it's important to see a board-certified dermatologist for the proper diagnosis and treatment," Eliason said.

"When skin cancer is not treated promptly or properly, the effects can be devastating," he added.

The researchers noted there is no scientific evidence to support black salve's safety and effectiveness. These products aren't regulated by the

U.S. Food and Drug Administration. However, black salve did make it on to the FDA's list of fake cancer cures that consumers should avoid.

"Although black salve is labeled as a natural product, it is not a safe one," said study leader Dr. Sarah Cipriano. She's a dermatologist at University of Utah Health Care. "Relying on word-of-mouth, marketing testimonials and Internet searches is dangerous when it comes to your health."

Most of the participants who used black salve heard about the products from a family member or friend. Only 30 percent of those who tried the products talked to their dermatologist first.

Some people opted for this home remedy because they wanted an alternative to surgery. Others thought it was convenient, the study showed. In some cases, patients didn't feel comfortable talking about black salve with their doctor.

"I've worked with many patients who have experienced the harmful side effects of black salve use," Cipriano said. "We hope our research will raise awareness about the potential dangers of these products, which far outweigh the supposed benefits. We encourage patients to consult with a [dermatologist](#) or other [health care](#) provider before considering a home remedy like black salve."

The study was published in the May issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*.

More information: The U.S. National Cancer Institute provides more information on [treatments for skin cancer](#).

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