

# Essiac Tea Treatment

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Essiac Tea is an herbal tea – a natural supplement – with four specific ingredients: Burdock plant root, Sheep sorrel plant, Slippery Elm tree inner bark, and Turkey Rhubarb root. Essiac is regarded as a natural detox method.

Rene Caisse (Essiac is her surname spelled backward) brought the tea to prominence in the 1930s, touting its benefits for cancer patients. However, neither Health Canada nor the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved Essiac as a cancer treatment.

## History of Essiac Tea

Essiac tea is a natural supplement with its roots dating to the Ojibway people. Also known as Chippewa, the Ojibway tribe lived primarily in Ontario and Manitoba, Canada, as well as in Minnesota and North Dakota in the United States.

Of the four ingredients in Essiac tea, two of them – Burdock and Turkey Rhubarb – are steeped in Chinese medicine history.

Dr. Daniel Nuzum has used Essiac tea for more than 30 years, learning the handwrought process from his father. As a proponent of Dr. Rene Caisse's original formula, Dr. Nuzum contends there is one way to address the making of Essiac – the old fashion way.

"It seems to be two camps: people that are true, the traditional purists, and then there are people that have taken it, tried to put a spin on it to make it better," he said. "It's really hard with ancient remedies to improve them."

## **What is Essiac Tea?**

Essiac is an herbal tea. For cancer patients, it is considered a supplement – not a cancer treatment. Essiac tea, however, is believed to have immune system benefits. It may be considered as an addition to natural, integrative, and conventional cancer treatments.

Essiac tea also is regarded as a natural detox method.

1. There are four ingredients in Essiac tea:  
Burdock plant root, Sheep sorrel plant, Slippery Elm tree inner bark, and Turkey Rhubarb root.
2. Essiac tea helps release toxins that can be filtered by the liver and excreted by the

kidneys.

3. A 2017 study showed that Burdock possesses bioactive immunomodulators, which has anti-cancer effects.
4. A 2018 report noted that Burdock inhibits the growth of various cancer cells, such as those of the stomach, lungs, liver, and colon.
5. Dr. Daniel Nuzum: "It's not a cancer-killing, tumor-destroying formula. That's not what it does."

Initially used by the indigenous Ojibway people in North America, Canadian nurse Rene Caisse gained notoriety for using the tea to treat cancer patients in the 1920s. She used locally grown herbs and administered it to patients within 48 hours of preparation.

"I have never claimed that my treatment cures cancer – although many of my patients and the doctors with whom I have worked claim that it does," Caisse wrote. "My goal has been [the] control of cancer, and alleviation of pain. Diabetes, pernicious anemia, and arthritis are not curable, but with insulin, liver extract, and adrenal cortex extracts, 'incurables' live out comfortable controlled life spans."

The Rene M. Caisse Cancer Clinic in Bracebridge, Ontario, operated from 1935 to 1941. The provincial government formed a Cancer Commission in 1938. It released a report one

year later recognizing limited benefits from Essiac in the treatment of cancer. The Commission did not acknowledge it as a cancer *cure*. It asked to know the specific ingredients before allowing the herbal tea to be tested further. Caisse, however, refused to release her formula.

In 1977, Caisse gave her formula to the Resperin Corporation, believing it could get Essiac approved as a cancer treatment. She died Dec. 26, 1978, at age 90. In 1995, Resperin transferred the Essiac rights to Essiac Canada International, and the Resperin corporation was dissolved.

Today, Essiac Canada International owns the rights to the formula and exports it worldwide. Essiac tea is available in powder, liquid, and capsules.

Neither Health Canada nor the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, however, has approved Essiac as a cancer treatment.

## **Essiac Tea Ingredients**

There are four herbs used in Rene Caisse's Essiac tea:

1. Burdock plant root – valued in traditional Chinese medicine as a blood purifier, an aid

for sore throat and colds, and as a topical for skin disorders including acne, eczema, and psoriasis.

2. Sheep sorrel plant – historically used for inflammation, scurvy, and diarrhea.
3. Slippery Elm tree inner bark – thought to have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.
4. Turkey Rhubarb root – widely used in traditional Chinese medicine for constipation, diarrhea, gastrointestinal ulcers, hypertension, and to suppress immune responses.

A study published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* revealed that fewer than half of oncologists discuss herbs or supplements with their patients.

“Lack of knowledge about herbs and supplements and awareness of that lack of knowledge is probably one of the reasons why oncologists don’t initiate the discussion,” said the study’s author, Dr. Richard Lee, medical director of the Integrative Medicine Program at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. [\[1\]](#)

Rather than focusing on treating cancer (tumors), Cancer Tutor research shows that detoxification and immune system health are the primary benefits of Essiac tea.

Essiac tea helps release toxins that can be filtered by the liver and excreted by the kidneys. These toxins, which may cause cells to mutate, are in our air, food, and water. Eliminating these toxins is essential to fighting cancer growth and ensuring our organs and immune system are functioning at optimum levels. [2] However, no controlled data are available from human studies to suggest that Essiac or Flor Essence can be effective in the treatment of patients with cancer.

One way cancer cells thrive is by hiding from the immune system. Cleansing the body of impurities allows the immune system to focus on killing potential cancer cells and protecting the body.

“Essiac does a lot for gut health,” says Dr. Daniel Nuzum, CTPP, DO, NMP, DM. “Some of the benefits you can look for if you're taking Essiac is an improvement in your gut health. When I say that, I mean reduction in the inflammation of your gut, improvement in your transit time (bowel movement), improvement in your liver function, improvement in kidney function.

“Outside of your gut, there is the lymphatic drainage component. [Essiac] is excellent for congested lymphatic systems. Those are your traditional uses of it. Personally, as a doctor, I

would use it for that gut health component, and also for the lymphatic drainage component.”

Research on the effects of Essiac tea is limited to animal and test-tube studies, plus anecdotal reports. These studies have had conflicting findings on the effects of Essiac tea on cancer cell growth. Clinical trials on its proposed effects are needed. [[3](#), [4](#)]

As Patrick Quillin, Ph.D., R.D., CNS contends in *Beating Cancer with Nutrition: Optimal Nutrition Can Improve Outcome in Medically Treated Cancer Patients*, “Get your immune system working, and the end of your cancer is in sight.

“Nutrition products that have demonstrated an ability to bolster immune functions include colostrum extracts (lactoferrin, transfer factor), whey extracts, aloe extracts, mushroom extracts (Maitake, AHCC), yeast cell wall extracts (1,3 beta glucan), IP-6 (phytic acid), ImmKine (Aidan 480-446-8181), and Essiac tea.”

## **Benefits of Essiac Tea**

Although Essiac tea is not a cancer treatment, research has shown Essiac’s ingredients do have health benefits to improve:

1. Gut Health
2. Immune System

Essiac has some antibacterial effects against Staph and E. coli.

Burdock root has been shown to be antibacterial and antifungal, while also inhibiting the release of pro-inflammatory molecules.

## **Essiac Tea Testimonial**

Dr. Daniel Nuzum learned how to make Essiac tea from his father. It is the traditional method, which requires mixing the four herbs at different times. It takes 14 days to make Essiac tea, and the Nuzums used 24-ounce Mason jars. At this pace, every two weeks the family had a new batch of Essiac to drink.

### **Frequency and Dosage**

Dr. Nuzum suggests one ounce twice a day. In his family, if someone was ill – though he says they hardly ever got sick – they would use two ounces twice a day. That was the base of what the family consumed, using Essiac tea as a nutritional supplement.

### **Cleansing the Body**



Dr. Nuzum notes if bowel movement is slow, the body will reabsorb toxins, which will further clutter the lymphatic system. In that case, the body will try to protect itself by taking those toxins and shoving them off in your lymphatic system – away from your heart, kidneys, or brain. So, the body protects itself, but that starts to create a toxic environment, which is what cancer cells thrive on.

## **DNA Responds to Environment**

Dr. Nuzum says the body has not turned against patients with cancer. Rather, their DNA has responded to its environment. When the body's environment is cluttered with toxins and our DNA is floating in, the body will respond to the water it's floating in. If that water is dirty, it's a free-for-all; anything can happen at that point. He adds that if cancer develops, we can surmise what caused it.

## **Essiac Tea for Gut Health**

Fruits and vegetables provide fiber key to a balanced diet. In turn, fiber builds good bacteria and promotes gut health. Kefir, which is rich in probiotics, and other pickled or fermented foods also help build a healthy digestive system. [\[6\]](#)

In addition to proper nutrition, sleep and exercise are vital in overall health and a thriving immune system. [[7](#), [8](#)]

The lymphatic system is the body's sewer system for the brain, heart, liver, kidneys, pancreas, intestines, muscles, joints – everything drains its waste into the lymphatic system. From there, the lymphatic system dumps its fluid into our general circulation, and the liver and kidneys have to filter all of that.

If anything in the process is clogged or not flowing properly, you're going to get congestion in the system. When congestion happens, fluid goes stagnant. Dr. Nuzum contends that water does not operate differently outside our body than it does inside our body. So, when the fluids in our system go stagnant, it accumulates waste.

Before too long, if that fluid stays stagnant, infections begin growing. Simply put, a congested fluid system invites infection.

Dr. Nuzum stressed that he would not use Essiac as a means to kill cancer. It is not a cancer-killing, tumor-destroying formula. Instead, Essiac helps change the environment in the body back to health.

## **Side Effects of Essiac Tea**

Two ingredients in Essiac tea have individual side effects:

1. Burdock plant root – allergic skin response
2. Sheep sorrel plant – upset stomach, abdominal cramps, diarrhea, possibly leading to dangerously low blood potassium levels, and kidney and liver damage

Of note, slippery elm's high fiber content may diminish the absorption of other drugs taken at the same time.

Dr. Nuzum notes the only Essiac side effect he has experienced is that the bowels begin to move – quickly and frequently. There may be a little bit of diarrhea.

Dr. Andrew Weil, the "father of integrative medicine, says, "Some Essiac promoters irresponsibly advise against chemotherapy and other conventional treatments when using the tea to help it work effectively. This is a reckless and dangerous recommendation. There is no clinical evidence that either Essiac or Flor-Essence has any anti-cancer activity. My advice? Avoid it."

Still, Dr. Nuzum remains undeterred, noting Dr. Weil's context.

“Interpreting what he’s saying, from his vantage point, if you have a tumor, he doesn't want people to just take Essiac to destroy that tumor,” says Dr. Nuzum. “He’s saying don’t do that. That’s not what it’s for. I wouldn’t recommend [Essiac tea] as a sole cancer treatment.

“Now, if you have a tumor, cleaning up the environment in your body is going to be super helpful,” Dr. Nuzum adds. “What you need in order to overcome that tumor, and overcome the process that developed that tumor, is you have to clean up your body – detoxify your body so that your immune system doesn’t have to spend all its energy containing waste.”

## **Essiac Tea for Cancer Treatment Studies**

The National Cancer Institute of Canada in 1998 published a report, *Unconventional therapies for cancer: 1. Essiac. The Task Force on Alternative Therapies of the Canadian Breast Cancer Research Initiative*, which concluded: “For most of the products reviewed, there has been some indication of possible benefit but no definitive evidence.”

A 2006 retrospective cohort study of 510 women, *Trial of Essiac to ascertain its effect in women with breast cancer (TEA-BC)*, reported

“Essiac does not appear to improve HR-QOL [health-related quality of life] or mood states. Future studies are needed to determine whether other clinical outcomes, such as cancer reoccurrence, are affected by Essiac.”

More recently, a 2017 study, *The Immunomodulatory Potential of Selected Bioactive Plant-Based Compounds in Breast Cancer: A Review*, said, “Immunomodulatory properties of medicinal plants have been shown to mitigate breast cancer cell growth. Different immune cell types participate in this process especially cytotoxic T cells and natural killer cells, and cytokines including chemokines and tumor necrosis factor- $\alpha$ . ... Research findings have shown that these plants [*including burdock used in Essiac tea*] possess bioactive immunomodulators as their main constituents producing the anticancer effects.”

Also, a 2018 report, *Molecular mechanisms of the action of Arctigenin in cancer*, cited results from a mice test that noted that “Arctigenin (ATG), a natural lignan compound extracted from *Arctium lappa* [Burdock], inhibits the growth of various cancer cells, such as those of the stomach, lungs, liver, and colon, as well as leukocytes, and regulates numerous intracellular activities, such as antioxidative, anti-inflammatory, and anticancer activities.”

As noted in the majority of research papers regarding Essiac and its natural ingredients, more in-depth research is needed to address potential cancer-fighting benefits.

## Summary of Science

There are more than 86 recent scientific research studies published on Essiac tea and the individual ingredients in the tea blend.

According to Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, purported uses of Essiac tea include: “health maintenance, immunostimulation, cancer treatment, HIV and AIDS treatment.” [10] The Patient Data Query for Health Professionals on Essiac gives a helpful overview of the current scientific findings noting that, “molecules with antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, anticancer, or immunostimulatory activity have been identified in the individual herbs in the Essiac tea formulas.” [2] To further clarify this statement, these findings have been reported in *cellular* studies. There are no definitive *human* studies with proper controls to suggest that Essiac is an effective treatment for cancer.

Manufacturers of Essiac state that the tea can be used in conjunction with other cancer treatments. Some of the supporters of Essiac tea

as a cancer therapy recommend it as the sole treatment with no additional traditional treatments (such as chemotherapy or radiation) with the rationale that these treatments may alter immune system function and impair the effectiveness of Essiac tea. As previously discussed, no peer-reviewed scientific studies have been published reporting that Essiac is an effective treatment for cancer or that traditional anticancer treatments interfere with the effectiveness of Essiac.

## Conclusion

Essiac Tea has health benefits but is *not* a standalone cancer treatment.

Instead, Essiac is a nutritional supplement for cancer patients. The first comprehensive study of Essiac – “In Vitro Analysis of the Herbal Compound Essiac” – was published in the *International Journal of Cancer Research and Treatment* in 2007. Among the study’s findings was a statistically significant antioxidant effect, more so than red wine, green tea, black tea, and cocoa. [\[11\]](#)

The research found an increase in the activity of several immune system cells when exposed to Essiac. There was, however, no direct bacterial killing observed in this study.

Previous studies have shown that Essiac does possess weak to moderate antibacterial activity against Staph and E. coli. Burdock root has been shown to be antibacterial and antifungal, while also inhibiting the release of pro-inflammatory molecules.

## REFERENCES

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6. Sleep Health: Reciprocal Regulation of Sleep and Innate Immunity
7. Debunking the Myth of Exercise-Induced Immune Suppression: Redefining the Impact of Exercise on Immunological Health Across the Lifespan
8. Essiac. Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center
9. In vitro analysis of the herbal compound Essiac

### **Additional Resources:**

[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dugald\\_Seely/publicat](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dugald_Seely/publicat)

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0753332>

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