



Published on *British Columbia Drug and Poison Information Centre (BC DPIC)* (<http://www.dpic.org>)

[Home](#) > [FAQs](#) > [Fiddleheads](#) > [Printer-friendly PDF](#)

Fiddleheads

Article type:

poison information

Access:

public



Fiddleheads are the curled, edible shoots of the ostrich fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*). Considered a seasonal delicacy, they are collected in the wild, sold in stores and outdoor markets, and served in restaurants.

Is it toxic?

Eating raw or improperly cooked fiddleheads can cause symptoms of **foodborne illness**. The cause is likely an unidentified natural toxin in fiddleheads. Symptoms usually begin 30 minutes to 12 hours after ingestion and may include **nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and headaches**. This can result in **dehydration**, especially among the elderly, infants and those with underlying medical conditions.

What to do?

If vomiting and diarrhea occurs ensure a good fluid intake to prevent dehydration.

If symptoms persist contact the Poison Control Centre.

How can I prevent exposure?

Fiddleheads should never be eaten raw. Proper handling and thorough cooking of fiddleheads can reduce the risk of foodborne illness. Wash fresh fiddleheads several times in fresh cold water. Remove as much of the brown husk as possible from the fiddleheads. **Cook in boiling water for 15 minutes or steam for 10 to 12 minutes until tender.** Discard the water used for boiling or steaming fiddleheads as it may contain the toxin. Fiddleheads should be boiled or steamed before sautéing, frying, baking or making other foods (e.g. soups, casseroles).

Need more information?

Call the Poison Control Centre

[Healthy Canadians - Food Safety and Fiddleheads](#)

[Healthy Canadians - Fiddlehead Safety Tips](#)

© 2011 BC Drug and Poison Information Centre

Keywords:

plants: gastrointestinal irritant

We are grateful to all the First Nations who have cared for and nurtured the lands and waters around us for all time, including the xʷməkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Uxwumixw (Squamish Nation), and səl̓ilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh Nation) on whose unceded and ancestral territory our centre is located.

© 2024 BC Drug and Poison Information Centre

All material found on the BC Drug and Poison Information Centre (DPIC) website is provided for informational purposes only. It is *not* meant to replace the expert advice of a healthcare professional such as a physician, pharmacist, nurse or qualified poison specialist. Use of this site is governed and restricted by specific terms of use. Please review the **full terms and conditions** below prior to using the DPIC website. In the event of a poisoning emergency, call your local poison control centre immediately. Portions of this web site are intended for healthcare professionals. Interpretation and application of information may require more

detailed explanation than contained herein, particularly regarding any clinical information that is found in or linked to this site. Patients are advised to consult their health care provider regarding diagnosis and treatment, and for assistance in interpreting these materials and applying them in individual cases.

Terms and Conditions

Source URL (retrieved on 2025-09-05 13:23): <http://www.dpic.org/faq/fiddleheads>