



Cooperative Extension Service

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Benefits of Ginger

With all of the fancy supplements and food-like substances available today we sometimes lose track of the amazing benefits of many real foods. A very interesting paper I recently read reminded me of one of these power-packed foods that doesn't often get much attention: ginger.

Ginger is a common culinary spice that is also used in many traditional Indian and Chinese medicines. Health claims for ginger range from improving circulation, digestion, and nausea, to treating asthma, diabetes and stroke. While many of these claims are unsubstantiated by Western science, there are a couple of areas where research on ginger does show some potential.

Ginger has long been recommended as a treatment for all types of nausea, and research does back up these claims for nausea related to pregnancy and possibly motion sickness as well. Further, a recent study shows promise for ginger in decreasing the adverse effects of chemotherapy when combined with a standard anti-vomiting drug.

Treatment of pain and muscle soreness is another arena where use of ginger has shown promise. Recent findings demonstrate that ginger may improve some symptoms of osteoarthritis and ease muscle soreness related to exercise. While the specific mechanisms of action are unclear, it appears that some of the compounds within ginger that give it its unique taste and smell may act similarly to common anti-inflammatory (NSAID) medicines like aspirin and ibuprofen.

Okay, so it may be good for you—but is it safe? Ginger is generally recognized as safe (GRAS) in the United States, but it is recommended that individuals with diabetes and those taking anticoagulant medicines should exercise caution. Though nothing is proven, it is said that large amounts have the potential to enhance anticoagulant drug effects and also affect blood sugar levels. As ginger seems to work in similar ways as NSAIDs to relieve pain, long-term intake at high levels could similarly lead to irritation of the stomach lining. Take home message: while a little bit is probably good, a lot is not necessarily better.

Ginger is available in a lot of forms (including powders, tinctures, and extracts), but I prefer to get it fresh. You remember that gnarled-up looking rooty thing in the produce aisle that you usually pass by? That's it. You can use it fresh at home, or it can be dried, pickled, or crystallized (to name a few) if you want to make it last a bit longer. With a little bit of work, fresh ginger can be made into a wonderful hot tea: just peel and thinly slice the ginger (more surface area = more flavor), and simmer in water for about 15 minutes. Use at least 5 thin slices per each 2 cups of water. Strain out the ginger pieces and you have a spicy hot drink that can be further flavored with honey, or the juice of a lemon or lime. *Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Sheridan and Johnson counties. He can be reached via email at kwillis3@uwyo.edu.*