



GINGER ROOT

Helps to prevent nausea

Ginger, the underground stem of the plant *Zingiber officinale*, has had a long and colourful history. Not only is it a staple in Indian and Oriental cuisine, ginger has been appreciated for thousands of years as an important medicinal herb. Chinese records dating back to the fourth century B.C. show that ginger was used to treat stomach-ache, nausea, diarrhea, hemorrhage, rheumatism and toothaches. Henry VIII recommended ginger to fight the plague. Passing candied ginger after a meal to aid digestion is a centuries-old English custom still practiced today.

As usual, when we study ancient remedies we find they should have a prominent place in our modern medicine cabinets, too. We can use ginger as a gargle for sore throats, to increase perspiration in cases of fever, to stimulate the appetite, aid digestion, and reduce gas.

STUDIES ON MOTION SICKNESS

One gram of dried powdered ginger root can prevent motion sickness. Patients who consumed one gram of ginger powder fared much better than patients given placebo or Dramamine. (Mowrey, *et al.*) Just as with so many other herbs, the side-effects of a natural phytomedicine such as ginger are insignificant when compared with OTC (over-the-counter) drugs that prevent nausea.

WHY IS GINGER BETTER THAN OTC MEDICATIONS?

OTC medications for nausea have side-effects that include dizziness, tinnitus, fatigue, incoordination, nervousness, insomnia and tremors. "In addition, these approved OTC ingredients are contra indicated in asthma, glaucoma, emphysema, chronic pulmonary disease, shortness of breath... Unlike other anti-nausea medications that act centrally, ginger appears to act directly on the digestive system, and therefore has none of the troubling central nervous system side effects found with conventional antiemetic drugs." (Blumenthal)

WHAT ABOUT OTHER DIGESTIVE DISORDERS?

Ginger has proven useful for almost every kind of digestive disorder, from indigestion, heart-burn, and gas, to nausea due to morning sickness or flu. According to author and herbalist Daniel Mowrey, "Ginger is the perfect remedy for acute nausea if you take enough to do the job. The biggest mistake people make in trying to use ginger root is not taking enough... First, the ginger rule of thumb: Use it till you taste it." (Mowrey)

IT'S AN ANTI-INFLAMMATORY, TOO

The pungent principles of ginger contain constituents that inhibit prostaglandin and leukotriene (leukotrienes are chemical compounds that are able to produce allergic and inflammatory reactions, and may take part in the development of asthma and rheumatoid arthritis) synthesis. "Inhibition of prostaglandin and leukotriene formation could help explain ginger's historical use as an anti-inflammatory agent." (Michael)

OTHER USES FOR GINGER

- Flavour is not the only reason why ginger is eaten daily in hot and humid climates. The antimicrobial and antioxidant effects preserve food.
- East Africans use ginger to kill parasites. "As a vermifuge, scientists showed that all 42 components found in ginger oil effectively kill intestinal round-worms. Some of these worked better than the commonly prescribed piperazine citrate preparations." (Keville)
- Ginger plays a valuable role in healthy hearts and blood vessels. Platelet aggregation or clumping is linked to atherosclerosis and stroke. Ginger compounds inhibit production of thromboxane, a compound found in platelets that promote clumping.
- Ginger's compounds help to keep cholesterol from being absorbed and because ginger increases bile secretion, it promotes cholesterol excretion.
- Herbalists use ginger to treat PMS as well as painful and irregular menstruation. "It directs blood to the pelvic area and helps relieve pelvic blockages. Its antispasmodic properties relax the smooth muscles and thus help alleviate menstrual cramps." (Gladstar)
- Ginger might be very useful for people who have a hard time dealing with winter's cold. It stimulates circulation, warming cold hands and feet.

SAFETY

Not only does ginger appear on the GRAS (Generally Recognized as Safe) list, it is noted in the pharmacopeias of 12 countries with no mention of drug interactions or adverse side-effects. As ginger is used in the daily diet of millions of people, it has a good safety record for pregnant and lactating women. The German Commission E states that ginger is contraindicated for morning sickness during pregnancy. "However, a recent comprehensive review of the clinical and pharmacological literature found no justification for cautions for ginger use for morning sickness during pregnancy when taken at the therapeutic dosage." (Blumenthal)

Ginger's anti-platelet activity may interfere with existing anticoagulant therapy. People taking blood thinning medications may wish to use caution when taking therapeutic doses of ginger, and should get their blood checked regularly.

DAILY DOSAGE

The German Commission E monograph on ginger recommends a daily dosage of 2 to 4 grams of the rhizome or equivalent preparations.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN BUYING GINGER

There's nothing like fresh ginger to enhance a stir fry, to make ginger tea, or even candied as a sweet. But for therapeutic use, ginger capsules are the best choice. Daniel Mowrey, author and expert on the use of ginger, "The best form in which to ingest ginger for effective application in the GI tract is the encapsulated powder... The encapsulated powder is better than tinctures, teas, unencapsulated powder, tea bags, and candied ginger root. But all of these forms will have some effect on nausea, and may be completely effective in mild conditions. Only the capsule will work for severe forms." (Mowrey)

Herbal Factors has produced a standardized extract of ginger root in capsule form. Each 1,200 mg capsule is guaranteed to contain a minimum of 4% volatile oil, making it a very effective herb to keep on hand in your medicine cabinet.

KEY REFERENCES

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