GINGER IN AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE

The Medicinal Properties of the Ginger Root

© Elaine Moore

Ginger is widely used in herbal medicine to reduce inflammation. This article describes what you can expect from adding ginger to your healing protocol.

The Ginger Root

The root or rhizome of Zingiber officinale, a plant commonly known as ginger, has been acclaimed for its medicinal benefits since ancient times. Native to southern China, ginger was imported early on to India, Southeast Asia, West Africa, and the Caribbean. Consequently, ginger root is used worldwide in various herbal traditions.

It's primarily used to prevent and relieve nausea, indigestion, heart rhythm irregularities, inflammation and pain. In patients with autoimmune disease, ginger is widely used to reduce arthritic symptoms, inflammation related to ulcerative colitis, and digestive disturbances. Ginger is also reported to lower cholesterol levels, inhibit replication of herpes simplex virus, and help prevent the formation of blood clots.

Growing and Preparing Ginger

Ginger grows as a knotted, thick, tan underground stem or rhizome. The stem extends about 12 inches above ground and has long, narrow, ribbed, green leaves, and white or yellow-green flowers. Ginger root is available in the produce section of grocery stores, in crystallized form, and as a spice.

Ginger root can be sliced or pulverized and made into an extract, tea, or dried powder sold in capsules. The sliced root may also be preserved (pickled) in sherry or vinegar. Alternately, the oil can be removed by steam distillation. Fresh ginger root can also be used in cooking, eaten raw, or crystallized and sweetened. Ginger is readily found in drinks (ginger ale), ginger snaps, ginger beer, ginger sticks and gingerbread. In Japan, ginger is pickled to make beni shoga and gari, or it is grated and used raw on tofu or noodles. A ginger-flavored liqueur called Canton is manufactured in the Guandong province of China. In traditional Korean Kimchi, ginger is minced and added to the spicy paste before the fermenting process. Ginger is popular in India and one of the main components in Ayurvedic medicine.

Phytochemicals in Ginger

The active ingredients in ginger root include volatile oils and pungent phenol compounds known as gingerols, sesquiterpenoids, and shogaols. Ginger oil represents 3 percent of

the ginger plant, and it is the oil that causes the spicy fragrance. Recent studies show that ginger has strong antioxidant properties. In addition, ginger reduces inflammation by inhibiting prostaglandin biosynthesis, specifically cyclooxygenase-1 and cyclooxygenase-2.

These effects make ginger comparable to those of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications although ginger does not cause the side effects characteristic of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications. Ginger also suppresses the immune system's production of proinflammatory cytokines and chemokines, reducing disease severity in patients with rheumatoid arthritis.

Dosage

Ginger is commonly found in 500 mg (0.5 gram) capsules. The daily dose should not exceed 4 grams of fresh root or 3.0 ml of tincture. For arthritis pain, 2-4 grams of ginger juice or powder can be used daily. Ginger can also be used as a compress or paste and applied directly to inflamed joints. For colds, menstrual cramps, and headache 2 tbsp or several slices of fresh ginger can be added to boiled water can be consumed 2-3 times daily. Fresh ginger root can also be sliced and steamed and the vapors inhaled. For nausea and indigestion, 2-4 grams of ginger can be used daily. Alternately a 1⁄4 oz piece of raw or crystallized ginger can be chewed. As with many herbal preparations, it can take up to two months before the full effects are noticed.

Ginger is also found together with other anti-inflammatory herbs such as turmeric in combination products such as Zyflamend, an immune support product recommended by Dr. Andrew Weil.

Side Effects and Interactions

Because ginger can interfere with blood clotting, it should be used cautiously in patients on anticoagulant therapies such as coumadin or heparin. Ginger may reduce the toxic effects of the chemotherapeutic agent cyclophosphamide.

Although ginger is very effective for nausea and morning sickness and is used to reduce the effects of several chemotherapeutic agents, the use of ginger capsules is not recommended for pregnancy. Ginger is also contraindicated in patients with biliary disease because of its tendency to cause bile release from the gallbladder.

Resources:

Ginger extract components suppress induction of chemokine expression in human tissue samples, Journal of Alternative Complement Medicine, 2005.

Ginger, Wikipedia, Ginger.

Antoine Al-Achi, Anti-Inflammatory Herb, U.S Pharmacist

The copyright of the article Ginger in Autoimmune Disease in Autoimmune Disease is owned by Elaine Moore. Permission to republish Ginger in Autoimmune Disease in print or online must be granted by the author in writing.