

Is garlic nature's best medicine? (Source Daily Mail)

For hundreds of years, garlic has been renowned for its usefulness in treating a whole range of ailments, from impotence to stomach bugs. But recent studies have found that garlic has more serious health benefits for the heart and cancer prevention than folklore could ever have predicted. Garlic contains two key compounds, a sulphur-rich amino acid called allicin and a protein-based enzyme called allinase. The clove has no smell until you slice or crush it, allowing the compounds to mix and form a third compound, called allicin.

Allicin is a volatile compound that survives for just a few hours. It is a powerful natural antibiotic - about one-fiftieth as powerful as penicillin - and also has anti-fungal and anti-viral properties. Allicin exists only in raw garlic. Cooking kills it and causes it to decay into other compounds which are less effective.

Garlic also contains about ten different kinds of natural sugars, including fructose, glucose and insulin, as well as relatively high levels of the trace minerals copper, iron, zinc, tin, calcium, manganese, aluminium, germanium and selenium. The level of selenium in garlic is higher than in almost any other plant.

Garlic works inside the body by promoting the ability of white blood cells to fight infections, and by stimulating other immune cells which fight viral and bacterial infections as well as cancer. There is a long-standing debate among specialists as to whether garlic is more effective consumed raw or in pill form. While some people say garlic pills are as effective as raw cloves, others say the pills are useless.

Cholesterol

A multitude of medical studies confirm that garlic in several forms can reduce cholesterol. In the most recent study, using garlic pills and a placebo, researchers at Oxford University noted a 12 per cent reduction in total cholesterol.

Coronary artery disease is caused by a build-up of plaque within the arterial system. Studies have found that garlic appears to be inhibiting new growth of plaque.

Antiseptic

Garlic is the only antibiotic that can actually kill infecting bacteria and, at the same time, protect the body from the poisons that are causing the infection. In studies, garlic has been found to be almost as effective as penicillin, while recent research shows similar activity to a more modern antibiotic called chloramphenicol, used for typhoid fever as well as conjunctivitis.

Even the blood of people who eat garlic can kill bacteria, and it is also reported that the vapour from freshly-cut garlic can kill bacteria from a distance of 20cm.

In the past, garlic used to be used to treat tuberculosis, as the invading organism, mycobacterium tuberculosis, is sensitive to several of the sulphur components found in garlic.

Cancer

There is a wealth of information published on the role of garlic in preventing cancer. Most research today is centred upon establishing which particular compounds, after allicin, are most active in inhibiting the growth of cancer cells.

Some very recent research from the U.S. proved that by injecting diallyl disulphide - formed when raw garlic is cut or crushed - into the bloodstream, tumours can be reduced by up to a half.

The research also found that another compound in garlic, called S-Allylcysteine, is effective in preventing cancer-causing agents from binding to human breast cells.

Other research found that increased garlic intake reduced nitrite levels in the body and resulted in fewer deaths from stomach cancer. It is also well known that garlic can help to strengthen the immune system, which is vitally important for fighting cancer.

Stomach ulcers or Chron disease

Modern medical studies have found that numerous diseases - gastric ulcers, ulcerative colitis, coronary artery disease, Kaposi's sarcoma and cervical cancer to name but a few - are triggered by

infectious processes caused by bacteria or viruses. Garlic may be helpful in treating or preventing some of these conditions.

Recent discoveries by Australian scientists show that stomach ulcers are either caused by the helicobacter pylori bacteria, or contributed to by it, and that garlic can relieve ulcers as it kills this type of bacteria.

Blood clotting

Garlic is an anticoagulant and could be helpful in protecting against the blood clots which can cause strokes. If you are taking aspirin to keep your blood from forming clots, garlic may be a more pleasant and natural alternative.

Mixing aspirin or other blood-thinning medicines with garlic can be dangerous under some circumstances though. Always consult your GP before taking garlic supplements in conjunction with medications for blood thinning.

Digestion

Allicin promotes the secretion of gastric juices by stimulating the mucous membranes of the stomach. It also combines with the stomach's natural proteins, reducing the excessive activity which can lead to indigestion.

In addition, allicin regulates the functioning of the stomach by activating the large intestine, so helping guard against constipation and diarrhoea.

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