

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*)

Common Names: African ginger, Jamaica ginger.

Description: The rhizome of the ginger herb is used medicinally.

Properties: Ginger has been used over the centuries to stimulate appetite, eliminate nausea and cleanse the body.

Uses: Use ginger to treat asthma, allergies, bursitis, arthritis, fibrocystic breasts, pain, lymphedema, high cholesterol, cancer, indigestion, atherosclerosis, morning sickness, nausea, motion sickness, colds, vomiting, influenza, strep throat and parasitic infections.

Doses: You can find ginger in many forms, which include capsules, pickles, teas, tablets and hexanol extracts.

Warnings: Do not take ginger if you are taking prescription medications to prevent blood clots.

Ginger Root Profile

Also known as

Zingiber officinalis

Introduction

Ginger is the most widely used and available herbal remedy on the planet, with billions of people using it every day as both food and medicine. A tropical perennial growing to a height of two feet, ginger has lance-shaped leaves and bears stalks of white or yellow flowers. Ginger has long been the subject of fable and literature. For centuries, Europeans obtained ginger from Arab spice traders, who protected their sources by inventing stories of ginger fields located in lands stalked by a fierce people called troglodytes. And Shakespeare wrote in *Love's Labour's Lost*, "had I but one penny in the world thou shouldst have it to buy ginger-bread." Ginger is used either fresh or dried in nearly two thirds of all traditional Chinese and Japanese herbal formulas. Fresh ginger is used to relieve dryness and heat, while dried ginger is used to relieve dampness and chill. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, ginger is said to "rescue devastated yang," a condition in which invading cold or infection has reached the interior of the body. Ginger warms the energy channels and stops bleeding, especially uterine bleeding. It is a detoxifier, and is always included in formulas with potentially toxic herbs such as aconite, acorus, and pinellia.

Constituents

1,8-cineole, 6-gingerol, 6-shogaol, 8-shogaol, acetic acid, alpha-linolenic acid, alpha-phellandrene, alpha-pinene, alpha-terpinene, alpha-terpineol, arginine, ascorbic acid, beta-bisole, beta-carotene, beta-pinene, beta-sitosterol, boron, caffeic acid, camphor, capsaicin, chlorogenic acid, curcumene, gingerols, sesquiphellandrene, zingiberene, resins, starches, fats, proteins.

Parts Used

Dried, peeled rhizome, chopped. Chopped ginger is used to treat "wetter" conditions, such as treating or preventing infections, while powdered ginger is used to treat "drier" conditions, such as allergy, asthma.

Typical Preparations

Teas, tinctures, encapsulations, in herbal formulas, and in cooking. First-time users of ginger tend to use too much. To make ginger tea, simmer 3/4 teaspoon (0.5 to 1.0 grams) of chopped ginger in 1 cup of hot water for five minutes in a closed teapot. To treat asthma, use an alcohol-based tincture rather than a tea.

Summary

Scientists have found evidence to support ginger's wide range of medicinal actions. These actions include the lowering of cholesterol levels, relief for allergies and asthma, arthritis, colds, and nausea; and protecting the digestive tract and liver against toxins and parasites. Ginger inhibits cholesterol production in the liver, which makes up to 85% of the cholesterol in circulation in the blood stream. Ginger also decreases the activity of plate-activating factor (PAF), a clotting agent that creates the clot that can result in heart attack or stroke. Ginger's ability to reduce PAF activity also makes the herb effective against allergies and asthma. PAF, which stimulates the inflammation seen in allergy and the bronchial constriction seen in asthma becomes more active when fat is consumed. Dried ginger, especially dried ginger tinctures, can offset this effect. In a clinical trial in India, the consumption of 5 grams (5 teaspoons) of dried ginger per day for seven days reversed blood lipid elevation caused by daily consumption of 100 grams (3-12/ ounces) of butter. Ginger relieves the pain of rheumatoid arthritis by stopping the immune system's production of inflammatory leukotrienes. Ginger's effects against infection have also been confirmed by laboratory science. One ginger compound kills cold viruses at a concentration of less than one part per million, a concentration to that found in raw ginger. Ginger contains a chemical called zingibain that dissolves parasites and their eggs. This antiparasitic effect is put to use preparing sushi. Sushi is traditionally eaten with pickled ginger, and ginger extract have been shown to kill the anisakid worm, a parasite sometimes carried in raw fish, within sixteen hours. In addition, ginger tea effectively treats schistosomiasis, a parasitic disease increasingly prevalent among tourists returning to North America, Australia, and Europe from lesser developed areas of the tropics. Ginger can protect the lining of the stomach from alcohol damage, which aggravate existing ulcers and promote the development of new ones. Ginger is especially useful in small doses in pregnancy. Some babies are born breech, that is, feet first instead of head first. Chinese researcher report that simply applying a ginger paste to a specific acupuncture point results in a 77-percent correction of breech births, compared to a 52 percent correction in women in the control group who had their babies turned manually. Ginger is also an age-old remedy for morning sickness. When used in herbal formulas, ginger protects the body from carcinogenic effects of valproic acid (Depakote), a medication commonly prescribed for migraine and seizure disorders.

Precautions

Although there are warnings in both Traditional Chinese Medicine and some medical texts about using ginger during pregnancy, ginger used in moderation, that is 3/4 teaspoon up to three times a day, poses no risk to mother's or baby's health. Studies in the late 1990's found that eating as much as 2 to 3

tablespoons of raw ginger or 5 to 8 tablespoons of dried ginger daily will not stimulate uterine contraction. Excessive use may cause gastro-intestinal upset.

Botanical: Zingiber officinale (ROSC.)

Family: N.O. Zingiberaceae

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---Part Used---Root.

---Habitat---Said to be a native of Asia. Cultivated in West Indies, Jamaica, Africa.

---Description---Naturalized in America after the discovery of that country by the Spaniards. Francisco de Mendosa transplanted it from the East Indies into Spain, where Spanish-Americans cultivated it vigorously, so that in 1547 they exported 22,053 cwt. into Europe.

It is now cultivated in great quantities in Jamaica and comes into this country dried and preserved. The root from the West Indies is considered the best. Also imported from Africa, there are several varieties known in commerce. Jamaica or White African is a light-brown colour with short rhizome, very pungent. Cochin has a very short rhizome, coated red-grey colour. 'Coated or Uncoated' is the trade term for peel on or skinned. Green Ginger is the immature undried rhizome. Preserved Ginger is made by steeping the root in hot syrup. Ratoon is uncultivated Ginger. Ginger is a perennial root which creeps and increases underground, in tuberous joints; in the spring it sends up from its roots a green reed, like a stalk, 2 feet high, with narrow lanceolate leaves; these die down annually. The flowering stalk rises directly from the root, ending in an oblong scallop spike; from each spike a white or yellow bloom grows. Commercial Ginger is called black or white, according to whether it is peeled or unpeeled; for both kinds the ripened roots are used, after the plant has died down. The black are scalded in boiling water, then dried in the sun. The white (best) are scraped clean and dried, without being scalded. For preserve young green roots are used- they are scalded and are washed in cold water and then peeled. The water is changed several times, so that the process takes three or four days. The tubers are then put into jars and covered with a weak syrup; this is changed after a few days' soaking for a stronger syrup, which is again changed for a still stronger one. The discarded syrups are fermented and made into a liquor called 'cool drink'; a few drops of chloroform or chloride are generally added to the preserve to prevent insects breeding in it. Ginger flowers have an aromatic smell and the bruised stem a characteristic fragrance, but the root is considered the most useful part of the plant, and must not be used under a year's growth. The peeling has to be done very thinly or the richest part of the resin and volatile oil is lost. It is sometimes soaked in lime-juice instead of plain water, and the colour is improved by a final coating of chalk. The Chinese fresh Ginger is grated into powder. African and Cochin Ginger yield the most resin and volatile oil. The root must be kept in a dry place, or it will start growing and is then spoilt. The odour of Ginger is penetrating and aromatic, its taste spicy, hot and biting; these properties are lost by exposure. The most common adulterants are flour, curcuma, linseed,

rapeseed, the hulls of cayenne pepper and waste ginger.

---Constituents--- Volatile oil, acrid soft resin, resin insoluble in ether and oil, gum, starch, lignin, vegetable matter, asazone, acetic acid, acetate of potassa, sulphur.

---Medicinal Action and Uses--- Stimulant, carminative, given in dyspepsia and flatulent colic excellent to add to bitter infusions; specially valuable in alcoholic gastritis; of use for diarrhoea from relaxed bowel where there is no inflammation. Ginger Tea is a hot infusion very useful for stoppage of the menses due to cold, externally it is a rubefacient. Essence of Ginger should be avoided, as it is often adulterated with harmful ingredients.

---Dosage--- Infusion: 1/2 oz. bruised or powdered root to 1 pint boiling water is taken in 1 fluid ounce. Dose, 10 to 20 grains.

---Preparation--- Fluid extract, 10 to 20 drops. Tincture, B.P., 1/2 to 1 drachm. Syrup, B.P. and U.S.P., 1/2 to 1 drachm. Oleoresin, U.S.P., 1/2 grain.