

Onions

Nobody knows just how long human beings have been consuming this rather pungent smelling cousin of the lily, but it is thought to be a very, very long time. We know that onions grew in Chinese gardens as early as 5000 years ago and there is evidence that the Sumerians were growing onions as early as 2500 B.C.

Apparently the Egyptians saw eternal life in the anatomy of the onion because of its circle-within-a-circle structure and used them in the mummification process.

But that's not all, for as long as onions have been used, doctors have also sung their praises. The Greeks used onions to strengthen their Olympic athletes, the Native Americans for insect bites and colds, the Indian Physicians warned of its aphrodisiac effects and the Romans used it to help with indigestion. So why all the fuss?

One of the main reasons Onion is such an effective home remedy is because like its other relatives: garlic, chives and shallots, it is very high in natural sulphur compounds. This is what renders the onion such a powerful antibacterial agent and explains grandma's rather strange tradition of hanging half an onion around your neck for a chest infection, or even chopping one whole and filling your socks with it to absorb through your feet! An easier, and more sociable way to benefit from this super food is the age old onion syrup, which is made by covering a diced onion in honey, leaving it to stand over night, and pouring the liquid off into a jar. The most obvious use of this syrup is for throat and upper respiratory tract infections, but recent scientific research has also tentatively confirmed the onions ability to arrest and possibly reverse tumor development.

Another well substantiated medicinal quality of the onion is its ability, like garlic, to prevent and treat arterio-sclerosis and heart disease. Its action on the cardiovascular system also extends to a regulatory influence on blood pressure and cholesterol, with 100 grams a day being suggested to be a sufficient dose.

Russian Doctors have recently found onion's sulphuric compounds to be highly effective in a wide range of tooth decay, with three minutes of chewing being deemed sufficient to kill most dental infective agents. The bad news however, is that for most of these effects the raw onion must be used, or at least the juice or syrup of the raw onion. If you really don't like the smell of raw onion, then spare a thought for those Greek Olympians who were rubbed in onion from head to foot to protect their joints! This may not be as far fetched as it first sounds, for onions have also been shown to have rather significant anti-inflammatory effects. This would explain its efficiency in some forms of asthma, and its wide spread use in rheumatism and arthritis. With such a high sulphur content, onion juice is also an excellent topical application for a range of skin conditions, from boils to athlete's foot.

But what about the aphrodesia I hear you say? Well, according to Ayurvedic doctors, the white variety is preferred and should be skinned, crushed well, and gently fried in ghee to be consumed on an empty stomach with a teaspoon of honey. If a contraceptive is more appropriate, then see grandma's recipes above and combine with the Russian mouth wash!

Till next time,

- The Barefoot Doctor