

# The Garlic Controversy

The word *garlic* comes from Old English *garleac*, meaning "*spear leek*" and has been one of the more hotly disputed foods since its first recorded introduction over 6,000 years ago. Perhaps first recognized in Egypt where it was not disputed at all, but elevated to a godlike status and worshipped for its life preserving qualities. The Egyptians even placed clay models of garlic bulbs in the tomb of Tutankhamen. As is so often quoted by many a garlic fan, it was so highly-prized in ancient Egypt that it was even used as currency.

The ancient Hindus valued the medicinal properties of garlic a little more tentatively and somewhat strangely from a modern perspective thought it to be an aphrodisiac. Perhaps that is why The *Talmud*, a book of ancient Hebrew rabbinical teachings, encourages eating garlic on Friday because making love on the Sabbath is considered a good deed. It was not considered to be suitable food for the priestly classes of India however because of its strong odor and also as it was believed it to be a stimulant which aroused the passions.

The citizenry of ancient Greece, especially the aristocracy, completely rejected garlic and found its smell intolerable. Anyone smelling of garlic was considered a barbarian and was prevented from entering the temples. Again the medical minds of the day could not help but be impressed by its enormous healing power however, with Hippocrates, along with later ancient physicians such as Galen and Dioscorides, considering garlic a panacea for a host of ailments from digestive discomforts and intestinal infections to high blood pressure, senility, and impotence.

In modern times science has investigated many of the wondrous claims made about garlic and has verified a great deal of them. Garlic's secret armory consists of more than 33 active sulfur-containing substances that do battle with enemies such as bacteria, viruses, and fungi. It seems that when a clove of garlic is cut or crushed, its extracellular membrane separates into sections and this enables an enzyme to mix with other components and form allicin, which is responsible for much of its medicinal action but unfortunately also contains the infamous garlic odor. This is why crushing garlic thoroughly is so important to extract the full potential of its healing qualities.

French microbiologist and chemist Louis Pasteur, renowned for his revelation that microscopic germs caused infection, was amongst the first in the modern era to recognize garlic's antibacterial properties. To demonstrate garlic's amazing strength, he noted that one milliliter of raw garlic juice can be compared to a milligram of streptomycin or sixty micrograms of penicillin. Other proven areas of action include Garlic's ability to:

- lower total cholesterol
- lower LDL ("bad") cholesterol
- lower blood pressure
- help keep blood thin, reducing the risk of blood clots and stroke
- function as an antioxidant.

Perhaps Pliny the Elder, a first century Roman scientist and physician summed it up when he said, "Garlic has such powerful properties that the very smell of it drives away serpents and scorpions." So keep crushing those cloves, but if it's the real thing that you are after, of course only use organic!

- The Barefoot Doctor