

Ginger

Not many herbs either culinary or medicinal have as rich and international history as Ginger. It has been praised by everybody from Confucius to Pliny the elder, but is thought to have originated in India where its cousin's turmeric and cardamom are also found. Ginger's name comes from the Middle English *gingivere*, or *gingifer*, but dates back over 3,000 years to the Sanskrit *shringavera* meaning "horn root" which is how we ended up calling it *Zingiber* or ginger. Although it was well known in Rome, ginger nearly disappeared in Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. Thanks to Marco Polo's trip to the Far East however, ginger came back into favor in Europe, becoming a highly prized herb.

In china ginger is looked upon as a very important medicine, and along with licorice is the grandfather of herbal medicine. The traditional understanding is so precise surrounding this medicine in fact, that different types of ginger are preferred for different conditions. Fresh ginger is used to cure nausea, gas, dysentery and mushroom poisoning amongst other things; whilst dried ginger is considered more warming and is used for certain types of constipation. In both China and the west ginger has proven extremely effective in the treatment of nausea, even out-performing the latest generation of pharmaceutical drugs! The use of ginger for digestive disorders is almost universal, with traditional healers employing it even to treat hot inflamed conditions such as stomach ulcers and reflux that one would normally think would be aggravated by this fiery herb.

In India, this phenomenon of being hot by nature but useful for hot and cold conditions alike is well known. In Ayurvedic medicine ginger is used to treat chronic rheumatism amongst other things, utilizing the plants now confirmed anti-inflammatory properties. The patient drinks an infusion of ginger before going to bed, and is then covered with blankets to encourage sweating. Alternatively a strong ginger tea can be made with hand towels soaked in the mixture and then applied whilst still hot to the affected joints. Some older people find that regularly drinking ginger tea is also of benefit for sore and painful joints.

In Venezuela, ginger is pounded into a paste and applied to the abdomen for difficult and painful menstruation. This shows yet another property of this amazing plant, for it is a valuable antispasmodic and circulatory stimulant. A broad range of cramps and spasms may be treated effectively at home with strong fresh ginger tea being used with hot compresses on the painful area. Sprains and strains may also respond to this treatment as an increased blood supply to the tissue means faster healing.

Finally, in the west, ginger is often used in folk medicine as an immune stimulant to increase metabolic fire and prevent infectious diseases. In this capacity ginger has proven effective against such organisms as malaria, *Shigella dysenteriae*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Candida albicans*, *Escherichia coli*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Streptococcus* and the *Salmonella*. To be used in this manner usually involves ingesting the tea hot with honey and sometimes lemon. It is of particular benefit at the first stages of a chill, or in bronchial conditions that involve phlegm and coughing.

In order to enjoy the benefits list above however, ALWAYS buy organic!

- The Barefoot Doctor