

Apples

With a history of at least 8000 years, the apple occupies a very special place amongst fruit. In Greek mythology, Gaia, or Mother Earth, presented a tree with golden apples to Zeus and his bride Hera on their wedding day. These golden apples then became involved with many tales of love, temptation and immortality ranging from the abduction of Helen of Troy to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. The sexual and romantic connotations of the apple however, have been replaced in the modern era with its association with long life and health. It is little wonder then that apples have since become the most popular fruit on earth, but is there any truth to J.T. Stinson's familiar saying, "An apple a day keeps the doctor at bay"?

Apples have certainly occupied a prominent place in folk medicine from the Hippocratic era to today having been used to treat an incredibly wide range of illnesses from: flu, fevers, sore eyes, bronchial complaints, varicose veins, heart problems, cancer, lethargy and anaemia, and to speed recovery after an illness. One of their primary areas of action however, seems to be upon the digestive track because the high amounts of Malic and tartaric acids they contain inhibit fermentation. Thus "An apple before bed makes your doctor earn his bread". Green apples, which are typically higher in these compounds are also traditionally used for flushing out the liver and the gallbladder, and will even help to soften and expell gallstones and parasites. A popular method to do this is the 'apple fast' where only apples are eaten for a period of time to speed up the healing process, (thus the term 'fast'). In addition to this, their high fiber content is also a gentle remedy for constipation, where as when cooked, they are administered during diarrhea.

Apples also soften the arteries and are considered a preventative medicine in both heart disease and cancer, with pectin being recognised as an aid in reducing high cholesterol and blood sugar. This combination of actions on both the liver and the arteries makes apples an ideal food for heavy consumers of alcohol. In addition to eating them fresh on an empty stomach, apple cider vinegar is also a well known remedy for a congested liver from over indulgence, which brings to mind the old saying of "Is life worth living? It all depends on the Liver"!

Recent scientific research has demonstrated how apples and apple juice can also help boost neurological health, specifically in the brain. The latest study from the University of Massachusetts Lowell (UML), published in the August 2006 Journal of Alzheimer's Disease, indicates that apple juice consumption may actually increase the production in the brain of the essential neurotransmitter acetylcholine, resulting in improved memory among mice who have Alzheimer's-like symptoms. This may also be in part due to the traditionally ascribed ability of apples to take dangerous chemicals and heavy metals such as mercury, lead and aluminium out of the body safely, due to their systemic cleansing action.

A final point in the defense of apples, is that it was not until the middle ages that Eve was first painted with an apple in her hand, and it is much more likely that the forbidden fruit was in fact a Pommegrant! So keep eating your organic apple a day and enjoy the Eden of good health!

- The Barefoot Doctor