

Real Foods that Heal
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Garlic: a tonic food for all systems

This should be fun. You're going to learn about a concept from herbal medicine traditions in this Real Foods that Heal bulletin. There is a special class of herbs (in this case an herb that is also a food) called tonics, or adaptogens. An adaptogen is a botanical medicine which has broad effects in multiple health systems in the body, and which is felt to generally strengthen the whole system. So adaptogens (or tonics) are often claimed to increase stamina and endurance, decrease fatigue and stress, and improve immunity, and they also may have well researched medical benefits in several areas at once. This is very different from pharmaceutical drugs, which are usually designed to fit like a key in a lock for only one narrow medical concern. But as you will see with this week's food, you get more widespread beneficial effects with a tonic, or adaptogen. And there's not a better tonic to start with than garlic.

Garlic's botanical name is *allium sativum*. The family of allium vegetables, including especially garlic and onions, were discovered early in human history, and in many cultures around the world, to have medicinal value. One of the most delightful parts of studying herbal and nutritional medicine is considering how modern science has confirmed the painstaking observations of our ancestors, and this is certainly true for garlic. One can only imagine the number of thoughtful village healers and keepers of the "medicine" in cultures around the world who noticed over time how garlic in the diet kept people well, and sometimes made sick people get better. And now, with centuries of hindsight in our favor, we can find over 3000 scientific papers on the medical use of garlic; we would do well when reading those papers to stop and give thanks for our forebears who had only the laboratory of their own eyes and ears.

Now you will see why I use this as a prime example of a tonic, or adaptogen. Garlic has great benefits for the cardiovascular system. Studies have shown a modest decrease in total and LDL cholesterol (fresh or dried powdered extracts). It decreases tendency to form clots in blood vessels, tends to open up vessels where circulation may be restricted, and helps to normalize blood pressure. One 4 year trial of garlic supplements showed a slight reversal in arterial plaques. Long term regular ingestion of garlic as a food also has shown value in preventing both stomach and colorectal cancer. It also has broad spectrum antimicrobial activity. Anecdotally, one may be able to stop the progression of a cold or sore throat by chewing up a raw clove of garlic at the first sign of illness (warning, this is not for the fainthearted... it's really strong!). Because it decreases tendency to clot, it should be stopped 7 days before any surgery.

There is ongoing debate in the medical literature over the exact components of garlic which are responsible for the benefits, and whether cooked or raw is better. I encourage you to eat some garlic every day, however you can,

a single clove per day would be a good goal, and consider a tablet form supplement on other days. But my preference is to enjoy it as food, and continue to discover new ways to let it add spice and interest to my dinners!

Garlic Pesto sauce

This is a great topping for a noodle dish, which combines garlic with heart healthy olive oil and walnuts as well.

Take 4 cups of fresh basil leaves and 8 cloves of raw crushed garlic, blend in food processor until finely chopped, then add and chop 1 cup of walnuts to the mix. Next, process into the mix about 1 cup of freshly grated parmesan cheese, then slowly mix in (with machine running) 1 cup (more or less to right texture) of extra virgin olive oil. When fully mixed, you have a delicious pasta sauce which is definitely a health food as well. It will be sharply flavored, so if you are not yet a big garlic fan, you may want to cut the number of garlic cloves. Enjoy!

To your health,

Robert Pendergrast, M.D.

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P.S. You know 5 people who deserve to know how to reduce their disease risk by food choices. Please forward this e-mail to them by using the link below.

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