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# American Botanical Council

## HerbClip

FILE: Ginger  
(*Zingiber officinale*)

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Date: December 26, 1995 HC 12-26-5-2

TO: General Distribution

Re: Monograph on Ginger

Reading, Gina. *Zingiber officinale*. *ATOMS*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1995, pp. 9-15.

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) has been used as a spice and as a medicine in China and India since before written history began. Because peeled ginger loses a lot of its essential oil content, extracts and dried ginger are produced from the dried and unpeeled root or rhizome, which is considered to be the most useful part of this perennial herb. Several commercial varieties of ginger, including Nigerian, Jamaican, and Chinese ginger, are available; they differ considerably in taste and smell, but all seem to be derived from *Zingiber officinale*. The most popular use of ginger today is in the food industry where it is employed as a flavoring.

Ginger is indicated for motion sickness, and clinical studies have shown it to work better than Dramamine, the conventional over-the-counter pharmaceutical for motion sickness, at suppressing motion-induced nausea. Unlike Dramamine, ginger does not affect the central nervous system, and so it does not induce drowsiness as a side effect. Ginger has been shown in at least one clinical study to have a powerful anti-nausea effect on individuals following surgery. Ginger has been utilized as a digestive aid for centuries; people in India rely upon it to help digest their "hard to digest legumes," and the Chinese serve it with crab, as it is considered to be an antidote and preventative for shellfish poisoning. Ginger has the ability to make the digestive process more efficient by increasing gastric motility, by neutralizing toxins and acids in the digestive tract, and by stimulating bile secretion. The author claims that ginger is an excellent natural antacid, and may help prevent peptic ulcers.

In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), ginger is used in conditions where the body is not coping well with elements of “moisture”. It is indicated in cases of rheumatism and winter chills, colds, coughs, flu, bronchial congestion, and even hangovers. It is considered to have a cleansing and purifying effect, improving circulation throughout the tissues, inhibiting formation of inflammatory compounds. It has warming and perspirative properties, and stimulates blood flow when applied externally. Ginger has been effective for irregular menstruation, stimulating and warming the uterus and reducing spasms. It has been used for centuries by Indian women to prevent nausea in the first stages of pregnancy, and is still useful today for morning sickness. The author cautions to use the herb with care during early pregnancy and only for nausea and vomiting.

The active compound gingerol is attributed with ginger’s platelet aggregation preventive action. Gingerol and other constituents of ginger have also been found to inhibit prostaglandin biosynthesis. Ginger has been shown to reduce serum and liver cholesterol levels in rats. It may have cardiotoxic benefits, but studies have not yet been conducted on humans.

Ginger acts as a powerful antioxidant, protecting fats from being damaged by free radicals. One Japanese study found that cancer patients benefited from a mixture of herbs including ginger. Ginger has been used to protect oils and fats from becoming rancid, and is often used to preserve meats. Another reason for its use in meat dishes may be that the proteolytic enzymes in ginger help break down protein.

Recently, research has shown that ginger has the unique property of assisting other remedies in reaching their destination, making it an ideal “emissary herb.” There does not appear to be any toxicity associated with ingestion of ginger root, although the author cites one source that says that large doses should be avoided by individuals with any skin complaints.