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Cancer Center

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FOR THE MEDIA

Ginger may help relieve or prevent nausea and vomiting.

Ginger root contains compounds that may help relieve or prevent nausea and vomiting. These substances can increase the flow of saliva and digestive juices and may also help calm the stomach and intestines. Some studies have found ginger may help nausea caused by chemotherapy, but larger studies are needed to confirm these effects.

Eating fresh ginger in high doses can have blood-thinning effects by preventing platelets from sticking together. Laboratory studies suggest that ginger can protect brain cells from the plaques that cause Alzheimer's disease, but this effect has not been studied in humans.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- To stimulate appetite

Ginger is known to stimulate saliva flow and digestive secretions, but clinical trials are lacking.

- To relieve indigestion

Compounds in ginger are known to stimulate saliva flow and digestive juices, reduce gas, and calm the digestive system, but human data are lacking.

- To treat diarrhea

Compounds in ginger are known to calm the digestive system, but clinical data are lacking.

- To treat nausea and vomiting

Some studies support the short-term use of ginger for chemotherapy-associated nausea and vomiting and motion sickness. However, ginger supplements should not be used around the time of surgery because of blood-thinning effects. It is also not suggested for use during pregnancy because of risks to the developing embryo.

- To treat arthritis

A few studies have been conducted with positive results, but more research is needed.

- To treat respiratory ailments

Certain compounds in ginger may reduce inflammation and protect against certain viruses, but human studies are lacking.

- To treat drug withdrawal symptoms

A small animal study suggests that ginger may help ease withdrawal symptoms from drugs like morphine. However, clinical data are lacking.

What are the side effects?

- Heartburn
- Skin irritation, swelling, and redness

Case reports

- Nosebleed, slow blood clotting: In a 76-year-old woman on long-term blood-thinning therapy who took ginger products. Clotting returned to normal after discontinuing ginger and with vitamin K administration.
- Severe fatigue and bleeding: In a 65-year-old patient who was on multiple medications and also took natural products like DHA, blueberry and ginger extract supplements, licorice, and pineapple juice. Some combination of these were determined to contribute to the problem, which was resolved with discontinuation of several products while limiting the intake of others.
- Fatal bleeding: In an 80-year-old man on a blood thinner with a history of irregular heartbeat. He presented with 1-day history of vomiting blood and black stool that began 3 days after taking a boiled mixture of ginger and cinnamon.

What else do I need to know?

Patient Warnings:

- Due to its blood-thinning effects, ginger supplements should be stopped 2 weeks before surgery, and should not be used immediately after surgery to control nausea or vomiting.
- Ginger supplements should be avoided in patients with bleeding disorders.
- Ginger supplements should be avoided during pregnancy or lactation.
- Ginger supplements should be avoided by individuals with gallstones.

Do Not Take if:

- You are taking warfarin or other blood thinners: Ginger supplements may increase the risk of bleeding.
- You are taking NSAIDs, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs: Ginger supplements may increase risk of bleeding when used with these drugs.
- You are taking insulin or medication to lower blood glucose: Ginger supplements may cause larger reductions in glucose levels. Clinical relevance is not known.
- You are taking tacrolimus: Ginger supplements increase the blood levels of this drug and may increase side effects. Clinical relevance is not known.
- You have a bleeding disorder: Ginger supplements may increase bleeding time.
- You have gallstones: Ginger supplements may increase the flow of bile.
- You are having surgery: Ginger supplements may increase risk of bleeding.
- You are pregnant or lactating: The effect of ginger supplements on human gestational development are unknown.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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