Ginger
(Zingiber officinale)

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Ginger was used to treat numerous conditions including stomachache, diarrhea, nausea, cholera, hemorrhage, rheumatism, and toothaches.

The Chinese believe that much of Ginger’s powers come from its ability to bring fluids to an area, warming it up. They say that it can mobilize the body’s defenses. Through its thermogenic action, heat is produced along with more secretions and sweating, which drives out toxins and microbes. Immunity is increased due to the presence of more white cells, and better circulation spreads the improved healing powers throughout the body.

In modern China, in addition to being an essential ingredient in almost every culinary dish, Ginger is used in about half of all herbal prescriptions. One of the main reasons it is added to so many Chinese medicinal mixtures is its ability to act as the “messenger” or “servant” or “guide” herb that brings other herbal medicines to the site where they are needed. In India, studies are showing that adding Ginger to certain drugs can enhance the absorption of the medication. One day, this may lead to Ginger being used for a biopotentiation effect.

Ginger in the United States
The Spaniards transplanted Ginger from the East Indies to Spain and then later, after the discovery of America, naturalized it here. It was popularized by the Eclectic school of medicine around the turn of the 20th century, as exemplified by the following excerpts from an 1898 medical journal. “This remedy is so common that many of our text books do not deign to mention it; however, it is an excellent remedy and should have a place beside the capsicum bottle on the shelf of every dispensary. It is classified as a stimulant, carminative, diaphoretic, errhine (promotes nasal discharge), sialagogue (promotes salivation), rubefacient (a counterirritant like muscle rubs), etc.”

“It is pungent, aromatic, and grateful to the taste.” “...we believe this remedy is a neglected one. Many times it could be given with, or in alteration with, other...
remedies to advantage…” “It is a stimulant to the digestive tract, and after all, everything depends upon digestion and assimilation. This tract is to the body what the firebox is to the engine; not enough fire and fuel, not enough steam; not enough food and absorption, not enough blood, or life.” “It promotes digestion by stimulation; it removes or prevents flatulence, thereby relieving or overcoming spasm and colic.”

“It assists in promoting the secretions and in reducing high temperature, etc. In atonic dyspepsia and enfeebled states of the alimentary tract, with specific nux vomica, ignatia, etc, or with so called bitter tonics if you prefer them, Ginger is an excellent remedy. In diarrhoea, in cholera morbus, with nausea and vomiting, with cold extremities and surface of the body, don’t forget Ginger.”

It is interesting to note that almost all the benefits of Ginger reported in this journal have been validated by modern science. Crude Ginger, Ginger extracts, and Ginger oleoresin were formerly official drugs of the United States Pharmacopoeia and National Formulary as a carminative, aromatic and stimulant. In another official compendium of yesteryear, the King’s American Dispensatory, Ginger was indicated for loss of appetite, flatulence, stomach gurgling, spasmodic gastric and intestinal contractions, and coldness of the extremities. Today, Ginger is official in the pharmacopoeias of many countries. In the Chinese pharmacopoeia, Ginger is listed as an approved drug for epigastric pain with cold feeling, vomiting and diarrhea accompanied by cold extremities and faint pulse, dyspepsia, and cough. The Ayurvedic pharmacopoeia additionally lists it for flatulence and intestinal colic.

Modern Day Uses:
While Ginger will prove to be valuable for the treatment of multiple problems, the overwhelming scientific support is weighted to pro-digestion and its antiemetic actions. Other applications may include its use in arthritic conditions, cold and flu, and as a supportive herb in botanical combination therapies.

Digestive uses
Consider Ginger as a stimulant of digestion. Consider it if you are having problems with gas; use it as an antispasmodic, if you have problems digesting fats, or having problems with appetite, or just an ordinary stomachache.

Nausea and vomiting
Many clinical trials support the use of Ginger against nausea and vomiting, both prophylactically and acutely, from a variety of causes, including motion sickness, perioperative anesthesia, morning sickness, flu, and even drug side-effects.

About one-third of all people receiving anesthesia for surgery suffer from postoperative nausea and vomiting. Because of all the complications that can occur after surgery, giving less drugs is better than giving more drugs, and there isn’t an available anti-nausea medication that is both effective and has no side effects. Unless we dig it out of our garden, that is. Ginger (500 mg orally) was shown to be effective when administered prior to surgery. In fact, none of the subjects tested, in a 1990 study, required postoperative treatment for nausea or vomiting. This was not even the case with the drug against which Ginger was tested.

Some Chinese cooks keep a small piece of Ginger in their mouth to prevent nausea from strong cooking odors. And, not that I would ever endorse overindulgence in alcohol, but if it occurs, add some Ginger to your hangover treatment.

Other uses
Ginger tea is often used for colds and flu. It can produce perspiration and increase circulation, thus potentially helping to speed the removal of toxins from the body. Ginger may also help with the pain and inflammation of diseased joints. It works topically and could be considered a valuable ingredient in a pain rub. And, don’t be afraid to try Ginger for any of its other folkloric uses. It can’t hurt and may help.