

Garlic: A Simple Way to Protect Your Heart

Garlic (*Allium sativum*) is known worldwide. As an ingredient, it is beloved for its rich, savory flavor and pungent aroma. Adding garlic to a meal seems to bring it up to another level. This wonderful plant, known by some as “the stinking rose”, even has an annual festival dedicated to it in Gilroy, California.

It’s one of my favorites, and I try to eat garlic on a regular basis.

However, I think a lot of people have mixed feelings about garlic – they love it with meals, but it certainly has its drawbacks.

For one thing, it takes a lot of garlic to get healthy benefits – and after a while, only so many people are going to want to stand next to you if you eat that much every day. After all, it didn’t get the nickname “stinking rose” for nothing.



Now it is very likely that you’ve heard about the many benefits of garlic, most of them relating to heart health. Maybe the good news about garlic seems a bit old hat. But it really shouldn’t.

After all, heart disease isn’t going away soon. Of course, we need to improve our sedentary lifestyle and poor eating habits as a first major step in being heart healthy. But while garlic’s virtues are well known, they should be respected, too.

In this *Terry Talks Nutrition*®, we’re going to review some of the best attributes of

garlic and explore the reasons why having a simple supplemental solution can give you the garlic you need without the bad breath and inconvenience that you don’t.

A Simple Way To Help Your Heart

When most people talk about the goodness of garlic, they mention heart health as a benefit (in addition to the wonderful taste and flavor it adds to virtually any meal).

There is very strong evidence of garlic’s support for the cardiovascular system. Clinical studies and overall reports about garlic have been very positive. In a recent overall analysis of 26 studies, garlic was cited as having “striking effects” during “long-term” interventions. In fact, the authors of this meta-study concluded that garlic would help patients in general “at risk of cardiovascular disease.”

One of the ways that garlic helps is by reducing oxidative stress in the body. Oxidative stress causes much of the damage in the cardiovascular system and is something that shouldn’t be ignored. In fact, oxidative stress and inflammation are the real reasons that cholesterol (which, on its own is *not* a problem) can begin to clog arteries. Fresh garlic has been shown to reverse the markers of oxidative stress in the cardiovascular system. Garlic also triggers nitrous oxide (a strong vasodilator) to “open up” blood vessels and reduce blood pressure.

In another meta-analysis, studies examining garlic and blood pressure levels were reviewed. All of the eleven studies that met the criteria (there were 25 to start with), showed a decrease of systolic blood pressure (the top number in your blood pressure readings) compared to placebo. The average for those in the subgroup that actually had hypertension was a decrease of 8.4 mm/Hg for systolic blood pressure and 7.3 mm/Hg for diastolic (the bottom number) blood pressure. That’s a big drop! That can mean the difference

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TERRY’S BOTTOM LINE:

If you’re worried about cholesterol and heart health, you don’t need dangerous prescription drugs.

Instead, you can harness the natural power of garlic to keep your heart and arteries running smoothly. But choose your garlic extract carefully. It should be a fresh extract and enteric-coated for the best results. The right garlic can:

- Reduce blood pressure
- Prevent artery-clogging LDL cholesterol
- Stop disease-causing inflammation
- Inhibit tumor growth

For best results, I recommend a fresh garlic extract standardized to the key compound alliin.

between having high blood pressure and having perfectly normal blood pressure for many people who are right on the edge of being diagnosed with hypertension.

The authors of the analysis concluded that “garlic preparations are superior to placebo in reducing blood pressure in individuals with hypertension.”

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Additionally, garlic reduces inflammation, which I believe is the root cause of almost *all* diseases, including heart disease and diabetes. In fact, inflammation, heart disease and diabetes are all linked conditions. In some cases this is known as “metabolic syndrome” – a situation of elevated blood glucose and high blood pressure, oxidized LDL cholesterol, and an increased amount of inflammation throughout the body. With the epidemic of obesity and Type 2 diabetes, we’re probably due to see a lot more metabolic syndrome in the near future.

As far as it relates to blood vessel dilation (something you want, in order for blood to pump more easily through the body), garlic appears to help in metabolic syndrome conditions, including preventing the platelet aggregation that leads to clogged arteries.

Now, I don’t believe that high cholesterol is really a problem in our bodies. The problem is **oxidized** LDL (low-density lipoprotein) cholesterol and its ability to form these blockages in the blood vessels. But garlic is able to affect this positively as well. In a scientific study, it reduced oxidative stress (a cause of inflammation in the blood vessels) and moderated the tendency of blood platelets to cluster together (a cause of abnormal blood clotting and cardiovascular disease).

What Are The Garlic Components To Look For?

The interesting thing about the compounds in garlic that make it work so well in the body is that they must work together *at the right time* in order to be effective. The first two compounds are alliin and alliinase, an activating enzyme. These two separate elements combine when fresh garlic is crushed to form allicin.

Allicin is one of the most beneficial compounds in garlic, and is responsible for its smell. Unfortunately, when allicin is exposed to oxygen the way garlic is during a meal, the allicin content is not very stable. It becomes

even less so in the acidic environment of the stomach.

Make sure that the elements that *create* allicin are present. That’s why you need to look for a garlic supplement that is standardized for its alliin content.

Fresh Garlic Really Is Different Than The Rest

A word about aged garlic: It really is different from fresh garlic.

Despite both originating as garlic, aged and fresh garlic extracts are not alike. They are processed differently and contain different components. Aged garlic extract contains S-allyl mercaptocysteine (SAMC). Interestingly, fresh garlic does not contain any SAMC, because this compound only appears after the aging process.

And remember the beneficial compound allicin? Aged garlic doesn’t contain any beneficial yield of this compound.

Other Health Benefits

Like all natural substances, garlic does more than just one job for us. Garlic has been recognized in recent research for having cancer-fighting potential, due to its anti-inflammatory ability.

As with all disease states, inflammation is closely related to cancer and the precursor events of dysfunctional cell growth and reproduction. While garlic has been primarily associated with heart health, there is growing evidence that the compounds in fresh garlic inhibit tumor growth.

One compound of particular interest is ajoene. A cellular study showed that ajoene was responsible for about 30% of the tumor apoptosis (self destruction) in human leukemia cells. Additionally, it even supported the other conventional treatments for these tumors.

Taking Care Of Your Heart Can Be Easy

Of course, you need to have a sensible diet and exercise program when you’re concerned about heart health. But taking a fresh garlic supplement each day is one of the simplest ways of getting the compounds you need for extra cardiovascular protection.

The German Commission E Monographs recommends at least 4 grams (about 4 cloves) of fresh garlic per day to be beneficial for overall heart health. Of course, getting that amount of garlic into your system each day can be a bit problematic – especially if you don’t like the taste of garlic, or just can’t realistically eat that much at lunch or dinner on a regular basis.

So if you love garlic with your meals, by all means, keep eating it. But when you need extra support for overall heart health, PLUS all of the other benefits that come from garlic, I thoroughly recommend a fresh garlic extract.

Adding fresh garlic extract to your regimen each day is one of the simplest things you can do for your heart *and* your health overall. TM

When in doubt, always consult your physician or health care practitioner. This column is to provide you with information to maintain your health.