

# ginger



The root that lends its flavor to everything from ginger ale to exotic curries is one of the world's oldest medicines


**If you thought the ginger ale** your mom packed for car rides was just a folk remedy, consider this: In a 2003 study published in the *American Journal of Physiology—Gastrointestinal and Liver Physiology*, volunteers with a history of motion sickness took 1,000 and 2,000 milligrams of ginger before undergoing simulated rotation. Ginger not only reduced nausea episodes, but also quickened recovery time. Ginger was more effective than Dramamine, a popular motion sickness medicine, in a similar study published in 1982.

Turns out, the spice that gives ginger ale its tasty kick is also one of the world's oldest medicines. Ancient Chinese, Indian, and Middle Eastern traditions and texts sing the praises of the root whose name is thought to come from the Sanskrit word *singabera*, meaning "horn shaped."

The nearly 1,400 varieties of ginger all have that pungent, spicy-hot flavor and stimulating aroma in common. Chalk that up to gingerols, the active compounds in both fresh and dried ginger that scientists believe make it such a powerful healing food.

Feeling achy or got a summer cold coming on? Try a cup of hot ginger tea to quell symptoms such as sore throat, headaches, and cramps. Steep 2 teaspoons of freshly shredded ginger in 1 cup of hot water, and drink two to three times daily, recommends Bob Linde, doctor of Oriental medicine and registered herbalist in St. Petersburg,

PHOTOGRAPHY Mike Lorig  
PROP STYLING Andrea Kraus

 To make your own ginger ale, try the Homemade Ginger Ale recipe on [vegetariantimes.com](http://vegetariantimes.com).

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## healing foods

Fla. In addition to reducing pain-causing inflammation, gingerols have antimicrobial and antiviral properties that kill germs.

Recent studies show that ginger may cure more than sniffles and tummy aches. Ginger reduces pain in people who suffer from osteoarthritis (OA), according to a study published in the journal *Osteoarthritis and Cartilage* in 2005. Over a 12-week period, 29 subjects with knee OA experienced less pain and greater mobility after taking ginger extract.

Early research hints that ginger could fight cancer too. In 2006, University of Michigan researchers learned that ground ginger, similar to what you'd find in grocery stores, can kill ovarian cancer cells. "Gingerols control inflammation, and inflammation contributes to ovarian cancer cell development," explains Jennifer Rhode, MD, a gynecologic oncology fellow at the University of Michigan Medical School and coauthor of the study.

A study published in 2008 in the *Saudi Medical Journal* indicates ginger may also benefit heart health. In this study, patients with high cholesterol who took 3 grams of ginger a day had significantly lowered cholesterol levels in just 45 days.

Getting more ginger in your diet is as easy as enjoying more Asian, Indian, and Caribbean dishes (which are traditionally seasoned with fresh ginger); opting for baked goods laced with fresh, candied, or dried ginger (gingerbread, ginger snaps, spice cake, or pumpkin pie); and starting your day with a honey-ginger combination (see recipe, below) that can be spread on toast or stirred into yogurt.

### Candied Ginger Honey

MAKES 1½ CUPS | 30 MINUTES OR FEWER

GLUTEN FREE

Store this spread, like jam, indefinitely in the fridge. Stir 1 teaspoon into ½ cup plain yogurt, spread on toast, or use in coffee or other drinks or over ice cream.

- ¾ cup finely diced candied ginger
- ½ cup honey

Stir together candied ginger and honey.

PER 1-TSP. SERVING: 16 CAL; <1 G PROT; 0 G TOTAL FAT (0 G SAT FAT); 4 G CARB; 0 MG CHOL; <1 MG SOD; <1 G FIBER; 3 G SUGARS

*Matthew Solan is a freelance health writer based in St. Petersburg, Fla.*

## Supplement Savvy

- What to look for:** Some people experience mild heartburn or upset stomach with fresh ginger, in which case ginger capsules are a better option. In general, ginger intake should not exceed 4 grams in one day, including what you obtain from food. Look for brands that contain 5 percent gingerols, often labeled as 6-gingerol. And let your nose be your guide. "A good ginger supplement will tickle your nose if you sniff the bottle," says doctor of Oriental medicine and registered herbalist Bob Linde. "It should have a distinct acrid and fruity smell."
- How to take it:** A standard daily dose of powdered ginger is 1 to 4 grams divided into two to four doses, taken with food. For motion sickness, begin treatment one to two days prior to travel and continue until you reach your destination.
- Safety:** Studies suggest large doses (more than 10 grams a day) might lead to sleepiness or cardiac arrhythmias. Because ginger has blood-thinning properties, pregnant women should only take ginger in amounts found in food (or about 1 gram daily). Avoid ginger if you take blood-thinning medication, including aspirin, or suffer from gallstones.