

The Heart Benefits of Garlic

By Jo Cavallo

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Although garlic may not ward off evil spirits, it may be instrumental in warding off a variety of health problems, including heart disease. Although scientific studies showing a heart-protective benefit are not conclusive, they are showing promise in the use of garlic to help prevent heart disease, including atherosclerosis (plaque buildup in the arteries that can prevent blood flow and possibly lead to heart attack or stroke), high cholesterol and high blood pressure. And that's not all. Research is also showing that garlic may boost the immune system and offer potential protection against the development of cancer as well as the common cold.

The reason garlic may have such health-protective powers is because it's rich in antioxidants, which help neutralize free radicals-particles that can damage cells and cellular components like DNA. Free radical damage can raise low-density lipoprotein (LDL, or bad) cholesterol and increase high blood pressure (hypertension). Eating garlic or taking garlic supplements may help decrease LDL and total cholesterol levels while boosting HDL (good) cholesterol levels.

While garlic is commonly used to spice up recipes and is generally considered safe by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, before eating large amounts of garlic or taking garlic in supplement form to prevent disease, check with your doctor to make sure it's safe for you. Garlic, like other herbs, contain substances that can trigger side effects, such as upset stomach, bloating, bad breath and skin lesions and it can interact with certain medications like blood thinners. Rarely, garlic supplements may also cause headache, fatigue, muscle aches and dizziness. Because garlic also has blood-thinning properties, which can increase your risk for bleeding during medical procedures, you should avoid eating garlic or taking supplements before surgery.

Staying Heart Healthy

In addition to eating garlic in moderate amounts, sticking to a diet that includes a variety of foods low in fat, cholesterol and salt and high in Omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, and fruits and vegetables, can reduce your risk of developing heart disease, as well as other diseases like cancer. Other ways you can stay heart healthy include:

- Quitting smoking
- Engaging in physical activity at least 30 to 60 minutes most days of the week
- Maintaining a healthy weight with a body mass index (BMI) of below 25
- Getting regular health screenings to check blood pressure and cholesterol levels

Source: [Qualityhealth.com](http://www.qualityhealth.com)

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