

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Garlic - The Healthy Smelly Lily

Yes, I know that garlic is usually called 'the stinking rose' even though it's really in the lily family, along with onions, leeks, chives and shallots. But more than its relatives, garlic has been the subject of many tales, and some real research about its health benefits. So far, the results are looking promising.

Garlic or some specific garlic extracts do seem to have real health benefits, at least for some people. If you don't mind the left-over odor, eating garlic on a regular daily basis does seem to help some conditions.

There's some evidence that it can help relax blood vessels and lower blood pressure. It somehow helps bring down cholesterol and triglyceride levels too, and it makes blood cells less sticky, so they don't form clots as easily. That can be good, but lots of garlic could make blood too thin if you're also taking a blood thinner from your doctor. Talk to the doctor or your pharmacist before you decide to double up on the garlic in your spaghetti!

Lots of garlic might also help cut your risk of some kinds of cancers, including throat, mouth and kidney, but this has not been as well studied yet. And some people find that garlic is great for loosening up joints stiff with arthritis.

With all of this health promises though, there are the questions. How much of it do I have to eat? Can I use garlic powder, salt or supplements instead of the real stuff? Must I use the smelly kind, or will the deodorized tablets do the trick too? Could I get

too much?

In the studies that have used real garlic and found real benefits, people were eating about 2 cloves of garlic a day. Garlic powder and salt have lost most of their active ingredients during the drying process. The garlic enzymes necessary to make effective compounds are destroyed so they don't show the same health effects. If you like the flavor (and can afford the sodium in salt), they're okay for cooking. Do not try to make your own garlic in oil at home. That can be dangerous!

Supplements though are another question. How much of which ingredients they have is very hard to determine. Some claim they have a certain amount of 'allicin potential' or 'allicin yield'. But this number is meaningless and the supplements close to worthless. Allicin is not the active ingredient. It never gets into our bloodstream. Pure garlic extracts, especially the ones based on oil, can actually be dangerous. Some ingredients in fresh raw garlic and garlic juice will damage the lining of our intestines. Garlic supplements that are 'enteric coated' can deliver these active chemicals straight into our stomach or intestines with enough power to cause ulcers, shrinking and bleeding. Garlic oil on the skin can cause allergic reactions. These are risky!

The one form of supplement that has not showed any risk is AGE or 'aged garlic extract'. This is made by using water to remove active ingredients. The liquid is then aged, as long as 20 months, before it is sold. It has very little odor. During the aging a lot of new compounds appear and some original ones disappear. At least one of the new compounds is responsible for the health benefits.

So, if you don't want to use fresh garlic, stick to aged garlic extract. But why miss the flavor of real garlic? A fresh head of garlic will keep for a month or more. Let it

sit for a couple of minutes after you peel and chop or slice it, to allow the healthy compounds to develop. If you want less flavor (and fewer benefits), use whole cloves. Don't use any green sprouts, they get bitter when they're cooked. Cut them out, and trim any brown spots off the clove before you use it. And remember, garlic flavor gets stronger with time. If you intend to eat leftovers tomorrow go easy on the garlic today.

Here's a super simple way to add garlic plus all the healthy benefits of spinach to dinner tonight. It only takes minutes to prepare, especially if you use prewashed spinach. Don't let the garlic burn, it will be bitter. Enjoy your next step to good health.

Garlic-y Sautéed Spinach

2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil (or other mild vegetable oil)

6 medium cloves of garlic

1 - 10 oz bag fresh baby spinach

Peel the garlic, then crush with the side of a heavy knife. Heat oil in large non-stick pan. Add garlic and sauté briefly. Add the spinach a little at a time, stirring as it cooks down. Keep adding and stirring until it is all wilted. Serve warm or cold. Serves 3- 4.

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