

PENNY SAVER NEWS

July 24, 2014

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.

Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

Ginger - Friend or Foe?

Gingerbread, gingersnaps, ginger cookies, ginger on pears, ginger in pumpkin pie, ginger beer, ginger tea, the list for how to use ginger goes on and on. Ginger is one of the traditional spices from the Orient, probably one of the ones that Marco Polo was looking for when he followed the Spice Route east. Columbus was looking for a shorter way to get to those spices when bumped into the Americas instead. And we are still eating and drinking ginger today.

Beyond flavoring, for generations ginger has had medicinal uses too. In today's climate of looking for simpler, traditional ways of treating ourselves, ginger has a major following. People use it to stop nausea and dizziness. Some women find it helps ease the pain of monthly cramps. A few find that eating it, or using ginger oil for a massage, helps ease the pain of arthritic knees. Those uses at least have a little medical testing behind them to say 'Yes, it might help'.

But of course there are dozens more claims than there is evidence. For instance, there is no evidence that ginger in any form will help the hangover after a night on the town. Nor is there any evidence that it will help you lose weight, bring down your cholesterol, stop your migraine, make your achy muscles feel better, fight off the flu or a cold, or speed up labor! Those are just a few of the wide-eyed claims made about the knobby root. If you want to eat ginger or drink ginger tea for those, go right ahead. Just don't expect results.

However, ginger can also cause some problems. It does do things in our bodies. And it does react with a lot of very common medications. Some are prescription, but some are over the counter products that are probably in every home in the country. Do you take ibuprofen (Motrin, or Advil) or naproxen (Naprosyn) for pain or aches? Skip the ginger! Do you use warfarin (Coumadin)? If you do, then don't eat much ginger. Ginger will thin your blood too, just like all those medications. If you take Coumadin and eat a lot of ginger, take supplements, or drink a lot of ginger tea, you could be seriously overdosing. You could find yourself bleeding or bruising very easily.

Ginger also changes how our bodies use some antibiotics, Cyclosporine and Flagyl in particular. If your doctor prescribes those antibiotics and doesn't know that you usually take ginger

supplements you could be getting a much higher dose in your blood than you should. Tell your medical provider about your supplements!

Persons with diabetes also need to watch how much ginger they use. It can change the effects of several diabetes medications, including the most common one, metformin, as well as newer ones like Actos and Avandia. It also affects how insulin works. So if you take medications for diabetes, and you like to eat a lot of ginger or ginger supplements, talk to your doctor or pharmacist. Don't suddenly stop eating ginger without talking to them, because if your medications are balanced and you change that, it could throw them all off!

Medications for blood pressure and Alzheimer's disease are also affected by ginger. It is especially problematic if you use nifedipine for blood pressure or angina. The National Institute of Medicine has a MAJOR warning on this combination.

And finally, ginger reacts with other supplements. Don't take ginger if you prefer to use ginseng, turmeric, red clover, angelica, garlic or ginkgo supplements. Some combinations affect blood sugar, others affect blood clotting. Stick to one supplement, not combinations.

If you just use a bit of ginger for flavor, you don't need to worry about reactions. Here's a delicious gingery fruit dessert for these hot summer days. The only reaction from this will be an ice cream headache if you eat it too quickly! Enjoy.

Gingery Peach Freeze

3 large, 4 small fresh peaches, or 1 ½ (16 oz) bags frozen peach slices (24 oz total)

1 pint low fat vanilla ice cream ¼ tsp each ground allspice and cinnamon

½ tsp ground ginger 1 tsp grated lemon zest

If using fresh peaches, peel and slice peaches. Put on tray and freeze until firm. Soften ice cream to spoon easily. Mash frozen peaches with fork. Add spices and pulse briefly in food processor or blender. Add ice cream and process until smooth. Serve immediately in glasses or refreeze briefly and serve in bowls. Serves 4-6.

Hillsborough County Extension is a cooperative service of Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners and the University of Florida.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Employment Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M., University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating.