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The Medicinal Benefits of Garlic, Ginger & Lemon: A Clinical Perspective (and recipe!)

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Introduction

In the realm of natural remedies and naturopathic medicine, few combinations are as powerful and time-honored as garlic, ginger, and lemon. These three ingredients, often found in kitchen pantries, stand out as potent natural remedies used for centuries across various cultures a wide range of therapeutic applications. From supporting the body's natural defenses by boosting the immune system, to improving digestion and reducing inflammation, the benefits of garlic, ginger, and lemon are well-documented in both traditional herbal medicine and modern scientific research.

The Tradition of Hot Infusions

Hot infusions—herbal teas served as a hot beverage made by steeping flower, leaves, roots, or fruits in hot water—have been a cornerstone of herbal medicine for thousands of years. These infusions are not only a way to extract the beneficial compounds from plants but also provide warmth and comfort and drive out infection – especially during cold seasons. In traditional medicine systems, such as Ayurveda, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), and Western herbalism, hot infusions are used to treat a variety of ailments, ranging from colds and flu to digestive issues and stress.

Garlic: The Ancient Antimicrobial Powerhouse

History and Medicinal Use

Garlic (*Allium sativum,* bulb) has been revered for its medicinal properties since ancient times. The Egyptians used it as a remedy for various ailments, and it was even found in the tomb of King Tutankhamun. In ancient Greece, Hippocrates, often referred to as the father of medicine, prescribed

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garlic for various conditions, including respiratory problems and digestive disorders. Traditional Chinese Medicine also recognizes garlic for its ability to warm the body, clear toxins, and promote circulation.

Current Medical Research

Modern science has confirmed many of the traditional uses of garlic. It is rich in sulfur compounds, such as allicin, which is responsible for its potent antimicrobial properties including the treatment of parasites, viruses, bacteria and fungus. Studies have shown that garlic can help reduce the severity and duration of common colds, lower blood pressure, and reduce cholesterol levels. Additionally, garlic has been found to have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects, making it beneficial for cardiovascular health and can be a useful functional food with cardioprotective, antioxidant, and antineoplastic activity. Too high of doses can cause gastrointestinal upset but it is generally well tolerated by most people including children. Consult a naturopathic physician prior to consuming medical doses of Garlic if you have severe bleeding disorders.

Ginger: The Warming Digestive Aid

History and Traditional Use

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*, rhizome) has a long history of use in traditional medicine, particularly in Ayurveda and TCM and was transported worldwide on ancient herbal trade routes. It is known for its warming properties and is often used to treat digestive issues, such as nausea, indigestion, and bloating. In Ayurvedic medicine, ginger is considered a universal medicine and is commonly used to stimulate digestion, enhance appetite, and balance the body's doshas (energetic forces). This pungent aromatic rhizome can reduce the bitterness of other herbs and tasty with honey.

Current Medical Research

Ginger is rich in bioactive compounds, including gingerol, which has powerful anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects. Research has shown that ginger can be effective in reducing nausea and vomiting, particularly in pregnancy and post-surgery. Additionally, ginger has been found to have anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving properties. Studies also suggest that ginger may help lower blood sugar levels and improve heart health by reducing cholesterol levels. Due to its sesquiterpenes, phenylpropanoids and resins it a good general antimicrobial agent, decongestant, and warming circulatory stimulant that promotes sweating to aid the clearance of toxins from the body. Drug interactions with Ginger are dose dependent, talk to a naturopathic physician if you are on medication and consuming more than 6-10 grams of Ginger per day.

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Lemon: The Citrus Immune Booster

History and Traditional Use

Lemon (*Citrus limon,* fruit) has been used in traditional medicine for centuries, primarily for its vitamin C content and its ability to support the immune system. In ancient Rome, lemons were used to treat scurvy, a disease caused by vitamin C deficiency. In Ayurvedic medicine, lemon is used to stimulate digestion, detoxify the body, and balance pitta (the dosha associated with heat and metabolism). This bitter, sour, aromatic fruit cools and soothes irritated or inflamed tissue and can thin mucous – useful when there are symptoms of cold or flu.

Current Medical Research

Lemon is packed with vitamin C, a powerful antioxidant that supports immune function and helps protect the body against oxidative stress. Research has shown that vitamin C can reduce the severity and duration of the common cold and may help lower the risk of chronic diseases, such as heart disease and cancer. Lemons also contain compounds like terpenoids- including limonene, and flavonoids- including hesperidin and rutin, which have been shown to have anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and antimicrobial properties. *Citrus spp.* can inhibit intestinal and liver CYP450 enzymes and this varies between different *Citrus* species, talk to your doctor before co-administering *Citrus spp.* with antifungal medications. Your doctor can also check for any other medication interactions.

The Synergy of Garlic, Ginger, and Lemon in Hot Infusions

When combined in a hot infusion, garlic, ginger, and lemon create a powerful remedy that harnesses the benefits of all three ingredients. This infusion can help boost the immune system, support digestion, reduce inflammation, and provide a natural source of antioxidants. It is especially beneficial during the cold and flu season, as it can help alleviate symptoms, reduce the duration of illness, and provide comfort and warmth. These herbs are generally well tolerated in children, adults and the older population – in fact the recipe below provides a tasty way to consume these herbs at first signs of acute illness – even children like it!

An At-Home Remedy: Garlic, Ginger, Lemonade

The tradition of hot infusions allows us to easily access their medicinal benefits. Modern research continues to validate ancient wisdom – these simple, natural ingredients can have a profound impact on our well-being. By incorporating garlic, ginger, and lemon into your daily routine, whether through a hot infusion or in your cooking, you can tap into their healing power and support your health naturally. In herbalism, wisdom and recipes are shared as there is value in tradition over trademark.

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Garlic, Ginger, Lemonade Recipe

Adapted from Mary Bove, ND, RH (AHG)

Supplies:

- *This recipe will be made on the stove top*
- 1 quart pot with lid
- 1 quart jar with lid (32 oz mason jar) or 32oz metal or glass drinking vessel
- 1 spoon for stirring
- 1 fine mesh strainer or cheese cloth

Ingredients:

- 32 oz filtered water
- 4-10 cloves fresh organic garlic (I like to use 6-8 cloves)
- 1 medium size organic fresh lemon
- 1 thumb size piece organic fresh ginger rhizome
- ¼ – 1 cup organic honey
- *Add additional ingredients if desired (1 small-medium organic orange, 1-2 tablespoons of fresh thyme, oregano, rosemary, turmeric, horseradish, or jalapeno, and/or 1-2 teaspoons of cinnamon powder, cayenne pepper powder or turmeric powder (with a dash of black pepper if using turmeric to aid in absorption).*

Instructions:

1. In a quart pot, bring 32oz of filtered water to a boil as you prepare the garlic, ginger and lemon.
2. Peel 4-10 cloves of organic fresh garlic and finely chop.
3. Wash and scrub a whole medium size organic lemon and finely chop (including the skin and seeds).
4. Peel 1 thumb size piece of organic fresh ginger and finely chop. I like to peel my ginger using the side of a spoon.
5. Once the water in the quart pot has reached a boil, turn off the heat and add the chopped garlic, lemon and ginger, cover with a lid and allow to infuse for 20-30 minutes. (Any time your medicine has an aroma cover it with a lid when the plant material is being infused to trap the medicine in the water as the volatile oils evaporate with heat!)
6. After 30 minutes, strain the plant material from the liquid reserving the liquid in a clean 32 oz mason jar, glass or metal drinking vessel. You have now made your lemonade! Compost the plant material.

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7. While the lemonade is still warm add honey to taste, about ¼ – 1 cup (2-8oz), stir to dissolve well. I like to add about ¾ cups to make a sweeter lemonade.
8. Drink this warm (to drive out infection) or cool (on ice to soothe inflammation)-your choice. Adults drink the entire 32oz batch slowly throughout the day at first sign of illness and until symptoms subside (several days if needed). Elderly should reduce the dose by about ½ – 2/3 the adult dose. Children should reduce dose to 2-24oz depending on their age. Ok to store in the fridge up to 2 days, after which throw out and make a new batch.

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