



## The Hidden Benefits of Garlic: Fighting Cancer and High Blood Pressure

Not only for flavoring foods and fighting colds, garlic may also help fight cancer and lower blood pressure. Is it too good to be true?

Garlic (*Allium sativum*) has long been a mainstay of healthy diets worldwide. Likely, you've heard that garlic works as a natural remedy, too—used to fight off a cold or flu. As far back as 1858, it's been proven that garlic cloves killed bacteria. Modern research indicates that this popular seasoning could help fight major diseases such as high blood pressure and cancer, meaning it may be much more powerful than we even thought.

### How garlic works as a natural remedy

Garlic is remarkably odor-free until you slice or press it. What happens next sounds like something straight out of a science-fiction movie. At blinding speed, an enzyme within garlic cloves called alliinase interacts with garlic's active ingredient, allicin—dubbed “**the world's most powerful antioxidant**” by researchers at Queen's University—releasing the bulb's signature aroma and flavor and turning it into powerful sulphur compounds that, when eaten, neutralize any harmful free radicals in the body in nanoseconds. But does this speedy antioxidant action justify garlic's millennia-old reputation as a super-healer?

**Take in the health benefits of garlic**

Chop or press a clove of fresh garlic into a dish during cooking at least once a week—that is the “dose” associated with lower risk for colon cancer. But to really harness this plant’s blood pressure lowering potential, have a clove a day.

Garlic supplements with standardized levels of allicin may be a good alternative if you’d like to avoid garlic breath. But be wary: reviews by the US watchdog group Center for Science in the Public Interest found that many supplements deliver far less allicin than their labels promise.

## **Garlic for colds**

In a study by the United Kingdom’s aptly named Garlic Information Centre in 2001, people who took a garlic supplement daily for 3 months had just 1/3 as many colds as those who received a placebo. And their colds lasted for an average of just 1.5 days, versus 5 days in the placebo group.

## **Garlic for cancer prevention**

The long-held notion that garlic may help prevent cancer is gaining research support. Clues come from major population studies such as the 1994 Iowa Women’s Health Study, in which University of Minnesota researchers tracked the health of 41,387 Iowa women for 5 years and asked about their intake of 127 common foods. Those who ate garlic (fresh or powdered) at least once a week were 35 percent less likely to have developed colorectal cancer a leading cause of death in the United States, Australia and Europe. 13 years later, University of South Australia researcher Suong NT Ngo reviewed 20 lab and human studies looking at garlic and colorectal cancer and concluded that a high intake of raw or cooked garlic may, indeed, have a protective effect. Bolstering the good news: 11 lab studies that illuminated garlic’s anticancer abilities, which include blocking cell growth, encouraging cancer cells to die off, boosting the activity of cancer-fighting enzymes and suppressing cancer-promoting enzymes. Lab studies also suggest garlic may slow or stop tumors in prostate, stomach and bladder tissue according to the American Institute for Cancer Research.

## **Garlic for heart health**

In the 1990s, advertisements on TV and radio and in magazines and newspapers claimed that garlic supplements were “clinically proven to lower cholesterol”, a promise disproven by later US government-sponsored research that compared raw, powdered and aged garlic extracts against a placebo and found no improvements. But if you have high blood pressure, a daily clove or the equivalent in supplements could nudge down your numbers by between 2 and 5 points. That’s not enough to stop taking blood-pressure drugs, but everyone adopting a regular garlic habit could lower overall risk for blood-pressure related deaths by 8 to 20 percent, says researcher Karin Ried of the University of Adelaide.

**Well worth a little garlic breath!**