

Ginger Hale

"Take some ginger and call me in the morning." That could become a new medical mantra—though it's a very old idea. Indian texts from 1000 B.C. prescribe the herb for ailments from asthma to piles. Asian doctors still use it. Now skeptical Western ones are getting the word.

In a fresh study of 644 cancer patients, one group took the liquid equivalent of a half teaspoon of powdered ginger for three days before chemotherapy and three days after. Group members reported a 40 percent drop in feelings of nausea, says study co-author Julie Ryan, a professor at the University of Rochester Medical Center. The compound gingerol, a source of the herb's heat, may block serotonin receptors that send a nausea signal to the gut. Or it might help empty the stomach. Folks on chemo should ask a doctor before trying ginger; it could interfere with certain anti-nausea meds.

Ginger can also stave off motion sickness and is being tested as a balm for arthritis, notes UCLA oncologist Mary Hardy. A ginger fan, she keeps honey-based ginger candies in her purse—just in case. —Marc Silver



Parts of ginger's knobby rhizome can be removed without harming the plant. They're the source of ginger products from powders to candies. The stringy dangles are the actual roots.