

Editorial



Garlic

Very few phytomedicines have enjoyed such extensive research and have such a long, fascinating history as garlic (*Allium sativum* L.). The plant probably originates from Central Asia and appears to have been used by man ever since the Neolithic Age. It was employed as a medicine in most cultures around the world:

- In ancient India, it was recommended to treat parasites, fatigue or digestive problems.
- In ancient China, garlic was used for respiration, digestion and to enhance male potency.
- In ancient Egypt, it was employed to prevent disease and mentioned in the Codex Eber as a treatment for many conditions.
- It is also mentioned repeatedly in the Bible and in the Talmund.
- The Jewish slaves in Egypt consumed garlic to stay strong and fend off infections.
- In ancient Greece, it was used for soldiers and athletes to give them stamina.
- Hippocrates advocated garlic for a range of diseases.
- In ancient Rome, garlic was used for conditions such as cardiovascular problems, gastrointestinal diseases, musculoskeletal problems and epilepsy.

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- In the Middle Ages garlic became a popular remedy for the poor, allegedly protecting them from the plague and other epidemics.

Much of history is, of course, based more on extrapolation than on fact. In particular, some indications for garlic look adventurous to us today. The problem seems to be that there is hardly an illness garlic does not seem to alleviate or cure.

Modern research has homed in on some of the historical experiences with garlic. For several decades, there has been both active basic research aimed at defining garlic's mechanisms of action as well as clinical research aimed at finding out how effective and safe garlic really is. Today one would be hard-pressed to find a herbal medicine that has attracted more research than garlic. A simple Pubmed search for “garlic” (15 August 2007) resulted in more than 2700 hits!

This Issue is an attempt to provide an overview of some of the results that have been generated recently. It covers a wide range of topics – from basic research to clinical investigation, from efficacy data to evidence on safety, from well-known indications, such as cardiovascular diseases, to lesser known ones, such as fatigue.

Research into garlic is active and productive – too productive to offer a truly comprehensive account in one single theme issue. I am nevertheless pleased

that we managed to motivate some of the world's leading experts on garlic research to report their findings. The future, I am certain, will bring us much more information about this intriguing plant.

Edzard Ernst
Guest Editor