

Ginger Debate

This rhizome has been the go-to remedy for digestive issues for centuries. But is it really effective and in what form? **Melinda Wenner Moyer** goes looking for answers

Ginger contains two pungent compounds — gingerol and shogaol — that are thought to ease nausea by blocking nausea-related pathways in the gut and brain, effectively stopping “the vomiting centre inside the brain from getting switched on”, said Megan Crichton, a researcher and dietitian who studies ginger at the Queensland University of Technology in Australia.

Some limited evidence also suggests that ginger supplements may ease symptoms by speeding up the rate of stomach emptying, said Dr Keshab Paudel, a pharmacologist and physician who studies ginger at the Burrell College of Osteopathic Medicine in Florida, US.

Much of the research on ginger and nausea has used supplements containing dried ginger root powder, Crichton said, which has been shown to help ease nausea in people who are pregnant, receiving chemotherapy or coming out of surgery.

In a 2025 review of studies, for instance, Dr Paudel and his colleagues found that pregnant women who consumed between 500 and 1,500 milligrams of ginger supplements per day had improved nausea symptoms, but they did not vomit less. And in a 2024 clinical trial of about 100 adults in chemotherapy, Crichton and her colleagues found that when participants consumed 1,200 milligrams of ginger root powder per day with food, starting on the day they started chemotherapy and for four days afterward, they experienced less nausea than patients who took a placebo.

There is little research on how ginger may help with more acute cases of nausea, such as those from stomach bugs, hangovers or motion sickness. And little is known about ginger's effectiveness with other stomach ailments like indigestion or irritable bowel syndrome.

One small study from 2023 did conclude, however, that it could help with symptoms of functional dyspepsia, a type of chronic indigestion. Parti-



ISTOCK.COM/DUSAN ATLAGIC

pants reported less heartburn, upper abdominal pain and burning, and excessive fullness after eating.

Ginger is available in many forms. You can eat it raw or as a spice, drink it in tea or soda, suck on it in a lozenge or swallow it in a capsule. But there is very little data on how the various forms compare when it comes to soothing the stomach.

Dr Joshua Forman, a gastroenterologist at the University of Maryland St. Joseph Medical Center in the US, often recommends that his patients with nausea try ginger supplements. They offer more consistent dosing than raw ginger or foods and drinks with ginger in them, he said, and are better tolerated by people who don't like the taste.

People who take blood thinners, immunosuppressants and blood pressure or diabetes drugs should check with a doctor before consuming ginger regularly

He recommends taking 500 milligrams twice a day to treat nausea resulting from a chronic issue, such as morning sickness, or from short-term ailments such as stomach bugs, hangovers and motion sickness, even though there is less research on how well ginger works in those contexts.

It's possible that other ginger-containing products like ginger-flavoured ales, teas and candies may help ease nausea, but very little research has been conducted on them. And they are often less concentrated than supplements, so you may have to consume more to get the same effect, Crichton said. She found, for instance, that you would need to eat 3.5 ounces of candied ginger — or between two and four typical servings — to get the same amount of ginger as is in a 300-milligram supplement.

And some ginger-flavoured foods and drinks may not contain much ginger at all. In a 2017 study, Crichton and her colleagues found that two popular ginger teas provided only 0.04 and 0.15 milligrams of

ginger per serving. Dr Forman warned that the same could be true of some ginger ales, which might only contain ginger flavouring. “Be careful and read the label,” he said.

Although ginger in any form is generally considered to be safe, Crichton said, people who take medications including blood thinners, immunosuppressants and blood pressure or diabetes drugs should check with a doctor before consuming ginger regularly. Although serious side effects are rare, people may find that they burp more after consuming it.

That said, ginger has few side effects and is supported by some science, Dr Forman said — it's “a valuable arrow to keep in the therapeutic quiver”.

NYTNS