

Why Your Stomach Will Love Turmeric and Licorice

When the archaeologist Howard Carter opened the tomb of King Tutankhamen in 1922, some 33 centuries after it had been sealed, treasures of unimaginable splendor were revealed to an incredulous world. The chambers were filled with golden objects. Surrounding the massive quartzite sarcophagus, which contained the mummy and its magnificent, solid gold death mask, were innumerable artifacts left by the boy king's faithful subjects to buoy him on his journey to the netherworld.

The variety of relics found in the tomb was staggering. There were statues, chariots, miniature ships, furniture, toys, perfumes, jewelry, and much more. Also found, however, were "treasures" of a more mundane nature: spices and other foodstuffs to sustain the king's spirit in the afterlife. Among them was an especially thoughtful item, designed to enable him to brew a sweet, delicious drink for refreshment: a bundle of licorice root.

Licorice - Ancients used it for medicinal purposes!

Licorice, a treasure fit for a king? Yes indeed. Licorice was highly prized by the ancients for its sweetness, and placing it in the tombs of the dear departed for their later enjoyment was a common practice. It's even possible that some of those lucky stiffies went to their maker later than they would have if licorice had not been around while they were alive.

It was not just the sweetness that made licorice so popular with the living, but also its medicinal qualities. Like many other herbal products, licorice became enshrined in folk medicine thousands of years ago. It was deemed particularly helpful for treating ulcers, gastritis (inflammation of the stomach), and various other gastrointestinal ailments.

Licorice was also used as a general anti-inflammatory agent and in the treatment of bowel irritations, bronchitis, cough, sore throat, and canker sores. People in southern Europe used to drink licorice water, believing it to be a blood purifier. And the Romans thought so highly of licorice that they included it in the rations for the Roman legions. (For more fun facts about licorice, see the sidebar on this topic.)

And for Us Moderns, too...

We know now that licorice has antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, anti-ulcer, anti-fungal, and anti-thrombotic properties, and it may have anti-cancer properties as well. In modern medicine, licorice extract is used primarily as a mild laxative, a demulcent (an agent that soothes and relieves irritation, especially of mucous membranes), and an expectorant (an agent that promotes the secretion or expulsion of phlegm, mucus, etc., from the respiratory tract).

Licorice is especially popular in cough medicines, not just for its demulcent and expectorant properties but also for its other major use in the medicinal arena: to mask the unpleasant (sometimes quite disgusting) flavors of other agents. In Germany, licorice extract is used for the treatment of gastric and duodenal ulcers and for catarrhs of the upper respiratory tract. And in Japan, one of its components is used in the treatment of chronic hepatitis and cirrhosis of the liver, owing to its protective effect on liver cells.

And the same goes for TURMERIC...

Another herb with a distinguished history of use since ancient times is turmeric, the spice that gives many curries and mustards their characteristic yellow color. Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), a member of the ginger family, is a tall perennial plant with yellow flowers. When dried and ground up, its fleshy, aromatic rhizomes (rootstalks) yield the bright yellow powder that people have prized for millennia for its pungent flavor. Turmeric's most prevalent use has been in its native India, where it's a common remedy in the traditional medical practice called Ayurveda.

In primitive cultures that lacked refrigeration, turmeric has long been used to retard the spoilage of meat and help preserve its nutritive value — undoubtedly the result of strong antioxidant action. The spice can also, however, preserve and protect living “meat,” such as ourselves, owing to its wide range of beneficial actions in the human body. In addition to its antioxidant action and its strong anti-inflammatory action (the latter makes it a widely used treatment for arthritis), the following medicinal properties have been attributed to turmeric: anti-microbial, anti-tumoral, anti-cholesterol, anti-thrombotic, and anti-hepatotoxic (liver-protective). From this impressive résumé, it’s easy to understand why turmeric has traditionally been called “the spice of life.”

These ancient medicinal remedies have been shown to kill *H. pylori*, the cause of most ulcers: By Hyla Cass, M.D.