

Help on chemo from the spice rack

Ginger is found to reduce nausea

By Shari Roan, Los Angeles Times | May 15, 2009

LOS ANGELES - Chemotherapy could soon become a little less grueling.

Simply adding a teaspoon of ginger to food consumed in the days before, during, and after chemotherapy can reduce the often debilitating side effects of nausea and vomiting, a large, randomized clinical trial has found. And a newer type of anti-nausea drug, when added to standard medications, can help prevent such side effects as well.

The ginger results will be presented later this month at the American Society of Clinical Oncology's annual meeting; the drug study was published this week in *The Lancet Oncology*.

The findings are significant, cancer specialists said, because about 70 percent of chemotherapy patients experience nausea and vomiting during treatment.

"Chemotherapy has come to be the thing cancer patients fear the most," said Dr. Steven Grunberg, a professor of medicine at the University of Vermont and lead author of the study. "We've made a huge amount of progress, but we haven't completely solved the problem."

In the ginger study, 644 patients, most of them female, from 23 oncology practices throughout the United States received two standard antiemetic medications at the time of chemotherapy. They also were given capsules containing either 0.5 gram, 1 gram, or 1.5 grams of ginger, or placebo capsules. The patients took the capsules containing the placebo or ginger for three days before chemotherapy and three days after the treatment.

All of the patients receiving ginger experienced less nausea for four days after chemotherapy, said study lead author Julie L. Ryan of the University of Rochester Medical Center. Doses of 0.5 gram and 1 gram were the most effective, reducing nausea by 40 percent compared with the patients taking the placebo.

The study is the largest so far to examine the effect of ginger, already widely used as a home remedy for an upset stomach. One gram of ginger is equivalent to about one teaspoon. Ryan cautioned that some foods labeled as ginger, such as ginger ale, might contain only ginger flavoring.

Researchers don't know why ginger helps, Ryan said. But she added: "There is other research showing it has a potent anti-inflammatory effect in the gut." ■

