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Ginger Eases Nausea From Chemo

Spice produced 40% reduction in symptoms among breast cancer patients

By Amanda Gardner
HealthDay Reporter

THURSDAY, May 14 (HealthDay News) -- Researchers have discovered the nausea-easing powers of ginger that many grandmothers are already familiar with, and report that the spice helped cancer patients who were undergoing chemotherapy.

"Ginger at a daily dose of 0.5-to-1 gram significantly aids in the reduction of chemotherapy-related nausea on the first day of chemotherapy, and reduced nausea will lead to improved quality of life in many cancer patients," said study author Julie Ryan, an assistant professor of dermatology and radiation oncology at the James P. Wilmot Cancer Center at the University of Rochester, said during a Thursday teleconference highlighting research that will be presented later this month during the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) annual meeting in Florida.

That dose is the equivalent of 1/4 to 1/2 a teaspoon of ground ginger, she added.

The trial participants, mostly women and mostly breast cancer patients, were also taking conventional drugs to quell vomiting.

"A lot of patients ask us as oncologists, 'Is there anything more I can do to deal with chemotherapy-induced nausea?' " said Dr. Douglas Blayney, president-elect of ASCO and medical director of the Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor.

The majority of patients undergoing chemotherapy do have nausea and vomiting. And nausea can persist even if actual vomiting is stopped. Some 70 percent of patients in chemo still have the symptoms even with common use of antiemetic, or anti-vomiting, drugs.

Ginger is a spice that has been widely used for decades to treat nausea and vomiting, Ryan stated.

These researchers, supported by the U.S. National Cancer Institute, enrolled 644 cancer patients who had already experienced nausea after chemotherapy. All participants had to still be facing at least three rounds of chemo.

The trial is the largest of its kind, according to the researchers.

Participants were randomized to receive either a placebo or one of three doses of ginger supplement: 0.5 grams, 1 gram or 1.5 grams for three days before the start of chemo and three days after for the next two cycles. All also received traditional antiemetic drugs on the first day of treatment.

Most patients report the most severe nausea and vomiting on the first day of chemo, Ryan said. If nausea can be reduced during this critical time period, subsequent nausea is also less likely.

While all doses of ginger helped with nausea, "The largest reduction in nausea occurred with 0.5 and 1 gram of ginger, which was about a 40 percent reduction in nausea," Ryan reported. The effect tended to wear off over the next 24 hours.

It wasn't clear if the same effects would be seen with ginger products, such as tea, ginger cookies and sushi, the researchers said.

More information

The **U.S. National Cancer Institute** has more on the side effects of chemotherapy.

SOURCES: May 14, 2009, teleconference with Julie Ryan, Ph.D., assistant professor, dermatology and radiation oncology, University of Rochester, and Douglas Blayney, M.D., president-elect, American Society of Clinical Oncology, and medical director, Comprehensive Cancer Center, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

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