



## July 20, 2004

### IN THIS ISSUE

- [Arthritis & ancient herbs \(boswellia, curcumin, ginger\)](#)
- [Health in the news \(carotenoids & cell communication, etc.\)](#)
- [New "Search" capability on web site!](#)

### ARTHRITIS AND THE ANCIENT HERBS: BOSWELIA & CURCUMIN

According to the Centers for Disease Control, arthritis and chronic joint symptoms affect one of every three adults, making it one of the most prevalent diseases in the United States. It is the leading causes of disability.

Arthritis, which literally means "joint inflammation," refers to more than 100 different rheumatic conditions. The two most common forms of arthritis are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.

Osteoarthritis develops when the cartilage that cushions the ends of bones breaks down, causing joint pain and stiffness especially in knees and hips.

Rheumatoid arthritis affects the lining of the joints, causing inflammation that often results in pain, stiffness, swelling, and joint damage in the hands and feet.

You can minimize the emergence of these diseases in a few different ways. For example, research shows that physical activity decreases pain, improves function, and delays disability (i.e., it's good to get your you-know-what in motion!).

Additionally, studies suggest that maintaining an ideal body weight and avoiding joint injuries reduces the risk of developing arthritis (and may decrease disease progression).

Unfortunately, no matter how healthy, humans -- as well as big dogs & other critters -- are still susceptible to painful joint inflammation.

Read on for a peek into the history of some ancient herbs useful in reducing inflammation and joint pain.

#### BOSWELIA SERRATA - COUSIN TO FRANKINCENSE & NATURAL ANTI-INFLAMMATORY

[Boswellia serrata](#) is also known as Indian frankincense and is a close cousin to the biblical frankincense (famous for its aromatic oils). Boswellia is actually a tree found mainly in India. When the bark is peeled away, the tree yields a gummy resin, which can be purified and used medicinally.

For thousands of years, boswellia has been part of the Ayurvedic healing tradition. Boswellia has been shown to have stimulating properties that address:

- Respiratory conditions
- Digestive disturbances
- Metabolic activity
- Joint inflammation

Boswellic acids are the active agent, with studies showing that boswellic acids inhibit production of leukotrienes, which, as many of you know, cause inflammation.

Boswellia also has a good safety record and does not cause gastric irritation (as Ibuprofen frequently does) or other adverse effects in any organs.

**Fast facts:** bioavailability of boswellia is increased by fish oil, flaxseed oil, evening primrose oil, vitamins B, C, & E, selenium, zinc, alpha lipoic acid, and, turmeric (in short, quite a lot of Co-op supplements, as it turns out!).

#### CURCUMIN - ACTIVE INGREDIENT IN KITCHEN SPICE, TURMERIC - ANOTHER JOINT COMFORT AID

Another anti-inflammatory herb found in Ayurvedic medicine is [curcumin](#).

Savvy cooks who are curry crazy may know that curcumin is the active ingredient in turmeric (yep, turmeric is that bright yellow spice in curries)!

Curry connoisseurs, however, may not know that natural turmeric contains very little curcumin, making its anti-inflammatory action rather weak compared to standardized extracts in dietary supplements.

Historically, in both Indian and Chinese medicine, curcumin was prescribed for a variety of conditions in addition to inflammation, including poor vision, coughs, etc. Studies have more recently shown curcumin's promise for

brain health and cancer treatments.

When it comes to joint comfort, curcumin has repeatedly been shown to relieve symptoms, again without side effects.

Rheumatoid arthritis patients who took curcumin in clinical trials showed improvements in morning stiffness, joint swelling, and physical activity like walking.

As a bonus, curcumin has the added benefit of being a powerful antioxidant and scavenging many of the free radicals generated by arthritic inflammation.

Fast facts: bioavailability of curcumin is enhanced by [milk thistle extract](#), licorice, artichoke, and various bioflavonoids.

## GINGER - SPICY JOINT COMFORT AID

Ginger is grown in many countries around the world and has a long history of medicinal as well as culinary use. The root of the ginger plant has been used to treat abdominal bloating, coughing, vomiting, diarrhea and also inflammatory joint diseases.

Also, ginger is reputed to be an aphrodisiac. Of course, if that's the case, this newsletter is going to cause a run on ginger! Meow in advance! ^..^

Like boswellia, ginger inhibits inflammatory mediators (i.e., leukotrienes) and is usually quite friendly to the stomach. Ginger also has powerful antioxidant activity that is important when fighting joint discomfort. Pretty cool for a common culinary spice, eh?

Before you make some ginger tea or try to rev up a loved one's engine with some raw ginger root, it's good to know what form to use.

Most studies use dry ginger root powder, and have reported improvement in pain relief, joint mobility and a decrease in swelling and morning stiffness for study participants.

Fast fact: the dried root of ginger contains approximately 1-4% "volatile oils," (the active constituents that give ginger its characteristic flavor and scent).

Fresh ginger root, however, may yield even better results because it contains a higher level of gingerols, the active agent in relieving joint inflammation, than the dried form. Enjoy, but don't try to interest your favorite feline in this particular gustatory ritual!

## HEALTH IN THE NEWS

- [Cinnamon oil effective as mosquito killer](#)
- [Carotenoids play a role in cell communication](#)
- [Regimens: Stopping Cancer Before It Starts](#) (NY Times free login required)

## NEW "SEARCH" CAPABILITY ON WEB SITE

Ta da da da! Our resident nerd has installed a search tool on our web site, so you may now find all pages related to a given category of interest (for example, "heart health").

I know, I know, some of you are shaking your heads, considering us barely out of the dark ages when it comes to web technology.

Well, since you're all so cheap, so are we. This little search tool came free.

It's a small thing, but over time, it will help (as our site grows!).

Alas! If only humans were as good at finding things in the dark as felines are. ^..^

Hope you're staying cool this July. More later this week!

Still purringly yours,

Guido

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"Making Health Affordable Together"

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