

# kitchen pharmacy

**Max Drake** is a practising medical herbalist in Bristol and runs workshops and events with the *Urban Fringe Pharmacy*, teaching how to use herbs safely and effectively to treat common ailments.

In the language of herbalists, we would describe ginger as a 'stimulating carminative'. Carminatives are herbs that calm and support the digestion, soothing the stomach, relieving wind, easing cramps, and generally encouraging normal digestion and absorption. Carminative herbs all contain aromatic oils, and in the case of ginger there are many different types, which combine together to produce a whole array of different sensations and flavours. For example, if you make a tea out of sliced fresh ginger – always in a pot with a lid on – once you get beneath the heat you can taste lemon and other citrus flavours. These aromatic oils act as natural proteases and lipases, which help us to digest proteins and fats, and as powerful anti-oxidants, which help to prevent food from going off, or rancid, and which have a hugely beneficial effect on our bodies.

The main thing about ginger, is the heat. This is primarily provided by pungent, resinous compounds known as gingerol and shogaol, which are not particularly soluble in water, although you can certainly taste them in a tea. These compounds give ginger its special properties. For starters, it is the best anti-nausea remedy, and helps a lot of people get over travel sickness. The heat permeates your whole being, improving circulation and helping to lower blood pressure. If used consistently over time ginger can also reduce blood cholesterol levels.

If you feel the cold, with a lack of vitality and energy, particularly at this time of year during cold weather, or if you're

showing any other signs of poor circulation, such as slow wound healing or muscle pain on exercise, then get the ginger in. Its cheap, easy to prepare, extremely safe, and readily available. Make tea, use it in cooking or, to get the best out of it, try slicing it up as thinly as possible and steeping it in honey for a month or so – this will extract those wonderful resins. The honey method incidentally, is often highly effective for treating morning sickness.

It is worth noting that ginger is only one weapon in the campaign to promote healthy circulation, and there are many other herbs you can combine with it to have a profound effect. Herbalists like me tend to use it in this way, and regard it as a 'delivery vehicle', helping to deliver the actions of other remedies to where they are needed in the body. For a tailor-made mixture to suit your own constitution, it would be advisable to have a consultation with a qualified medical herbalist. ■

To find out more about Max's medical practice, workshops and events, visit [www.maxdrake.co.uk](http://www.maxdrake.co.uk) and [www.urbanfringe.org](http://www.urbanfringe.org).

