

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.

THE POWER OF RAW GARLIC

At some point in history, garlic fell out of favour with the English. According to Mrs. Beeton, the famous Victorian cookery writer, "the flavour is disagreeable to the English palate." I'm not sure she'd get away with that if she was alive today.

In terms of the kitchen pharmacy, there is no doubt that garlic packs its strongest punch when it's fresh and raw. When you crush a fresh clove of garlic some interesting things happen. Garlic contains an amino acid called alliin, and when the clove is crushed, alliin comes into contact with an enzyme which converts it into the much stronger-tasting compound alliin. It is the alliin that helps to make garlic such a useful herbal medicine, as it is responsible for much of garlic's antibacterial and anti-fungal activity. It is also unstable, and in less than a day changes into strong-smelling, oily sulphurous compounds.

When taken raw, garlic can break up catarrh and bronchial congestion, and can be very effective in treating laryngitis and tonsillitis. In the Middle East people chew cloves of garlic to keep away coughs and influenza. This is mainly because the antibacterial compounds are excreted quite quickly through the lungs (which is why the smell lingers on the breath afterwards) and on the way help to kill off any developing infections.

Another thing that raw garlic is particularly effective for is the treatment of fungal and yeast infections in the gut, and also for helping to remove parasites. It has the raw power to attack invasive organisms without harming the body.

Finally, it is well known that long-term use of garlic helps to protect the heart and arteries against atherosclerosis, and it can also help in lowering blood pressure. For this you don't necessarily need to use raw garlic, as it is thought that other, less volatile compounds might be responsible.

If the thought of eating a clove of raw garlic makes you wince, there are several ways in which you can disguise it. Sliced up in a sandwich is good, or stuffed into an olive or two. A thin slice placed inside a sliced grape cools it down a bit. Or you can make fresh guacamole

with some mashed avocado. Chewing fresh parsley afterwards will help with your breath although you might have to chew quite a lot.

There are a couple of side effects that get some people after chewing raw garlic. Firstly, it can have the effect of making you slightly aggressive. Maybe that's what the fabled 'latin temperament' is all about. So if you're already feeling a bit grouchy watch out for that. It also gives some people the hiccups for a short while – which is probably a small price to pay for all its amazing health benefits. ■

To find out more about Max's medical practice, workshops and events, visit www.maxdrake.co.uk and www.urbanfringe.org.

