



5 Ways to Fight Colds and Flu with Garlic

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For thousands of years, people have relied on garlic to keep infections at bay, increase energy, support the heart, and flavor their food. Humans have been cultivating garlic for so long that we aren't even entirely sure where and when the first cultivation practices began; perhaps Asia or ancient Persia? Sumerian clay tablets written almost 5,000 years ago reference the medicinal and edible properties of garlic and we know that it was used as medicine in ancient Egypt and Greece.

Why the popularity?

Garlic is a powerful herb that adds evocative flavor to your food while also providing many health benefits. Herbalists commonly use garlic for symptoms of upper respiratory infections, as a general antimicrobial, and to support both heart health and digestion.



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It's inexpensive and can be readily found at your local grocery store or farmers market. It's also really easy to grow in temperate climates.

While garlic has many far-reaching medicinal attributes, this article focuses on how to fight colds and flu with garlic. Regularly eating garlic can help support your immune system and reduce the severity of colds and the flu.



How Garlic Can Stop You From Getting Sick

Garlic is a complex herb that works in many ways.

From a traditional and energetic perspective, raw garlic is an aromatic, pungent, and spicy herb. This is a great herb to assist you in learning about herbal energetics! With even one small bite of a raw garlic clove, you can immediately feel its effects. There's nothing mild about garlic!

Garlic is super hot, spicy, and pungent, and is best used for cold and stagnant conditions. Reach for it when you feel like you are coming down with something *and* you also feel cold. Garlic can also be used to support the fever process. It is a stimulating diaphoretic, which means it helps your body to warm up when you have the chills.

Garlic especially shines at relieving congestion, whether in the lungs or the sinuses. Raw garlic is spicy and stimulates mucus flow, while also helping to thin and expel it from the body. This is effective both when using it internally or externally as an infused oil, such as being rubbed on the chest or feet. (See the

recipe for garlic oil below.)

Several studies have shown that garlic is effective at both preventing and addressing upper respiratory infections.

In one clinical trial, the number of upper respiratory infections were analyzed in three groups of children. In one group, the children were taking long-releasing garlic extract, another group of children was taking a pharmaceutical drug that was designed to inhibit upper respiratory infections, and there was also a control group taking a placebo. Those taking the garlic had significantly fewer upper respiratory symptoms compared with both the control group and those taking the pharmaceutical.¹[\[#fn-15166-1\]](#)

It's been my experience that, when taken at the onset of an illness, raw garlic may help to shorten its duration. One study showed that people taking aged garlic extract for 90 days had the same amount of colds and flu as those taking a placebo; however, their reported symptoms were less severe and they missed fewer days of work or school. The researchers concluded that the aged garlic supplement "may enhance immune cell function and may be partly responsible for the reduced severity of colds and flu reported."²[\[#fn-15166-2\]](#)

Garlic is renowned for its antimicrobial abilities and has been shown to be effective against many different pathogens in vitro.³[\[#fn-15166-3\]](#)⁴[\[#fn-15166-4\]](#)⁵[\[#fn-15166-5\]](#). Perhaps because of this, it is sometimes mistakenly called an herbal antibiotic. The term "antibiotic" means anti-life and is used to describe pharmaceuticals that indiscriminately kill all bacteria they come into contact with. While garlic has a significant effect against many pathogens, you would have to eat an incredible amount of it to kill healthy gut bacteria found in your digestive tract. In fact, garlic contains inulin, a prebiotic substance that supports a healthy gut flora.

Garlic also does something that pharmaceutical antibiotics never do! Garlic can increase your immune system activity. Studies have shown that it increases the natural killer cells of the immune system and reduces inflammatory cytokines (chemical messengers of the immune system).⁶[\[#fn-15166-6\]](#)



The Best Ways to Use Garlic for a Cold or Flu

To fight colds and flu with garlic, I strongly prefer raw garlic. (Many of the studies I've cited in this article were using aged garlic extract.) Garlic powder and cooked garlic don't have the same effects in regard to immunity (although it is wonderful for heart health and digestion, but that's a whole other article).

When buying garlic, look for garlic that has been grown locally to you rather than something that has been shipped overseas. During the autumn months, our local farmers market is bursting with locally grown garlic. You can even sample various varieties and get a sense of the complex variations between different types of garlic.

I like to stock up on garlic that has been braided. This garlic will stay potent and fresh for six to nine months.

To increase the potency of garlic each time you use it, crush a garlic clove and let it sit for 10 to 15 minutes. Then continue to prepare your food or desired remedy. (The 10-minute waiting period allows the enzyme alliinase to convert alliin into

allicin, which is responsible for the aroma and activity of fresh garlic.)

Here's a tip for removing the papery sheaths around garlic – this is especially helpful if you are preparing a lot of garlic. Place the individual cloves in a glass jar and shake vigorously. This will loosen and often remove that paper sheath, making the garlic a lot easier to process.



Cautions and Considerations (Garlic Isn't for Everyone)

- Some people are allergic to garlic and should avoid it.
- Some people are sensitive to garlic and moderate amounts will cause digestive upsets (such as gas and bloating). These people can avoid garlic or start with very small doses and build up their tolerance.
- Raw garlic can be nauseating or emetic; always start with a smaller amount and slowly increase to avoid problems.
- Garlic is very hot in nature. People with a hot and dry constitution will do best when using it sparingly.
- If eating garlic gives you unwanted potent-smelling breath, try eating a sprig

or two of fresh parsley after a garlic-infused preparation.

- It is commonly believed that garlic can overly thin the blood. These concerns come from in vitro studies (petri dish studies as opposed to human studies). However, several in vivo studies (done in humans) have shown that dietary garlic does not overly thin the blood and therefore may not be a concern for postoperative patients or for those taking warfarin.⁷⁸⁹ If you are taking any pharmaceuticals or medications that thin the blood (i.e., aspirin, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory, anticoagulant, or antiplatelet medications), please consult an experienced practitioner before taking garlic.

Five Simple and Easy Recipes to Use Raw Garlic

Garlic is cheap, easy to find, and simple to use in many different types of preparations. Below you'll see my five most common ways for using raw garlic, especially when I want to fight colds and flu with garlic.



#1 Super-Strong Garlic Bread (or Vegetables)

One of the simplest ways to eat lots of fresh garlic is to combine it with a butter or oil and then eat that on bread or a starchy vegetable.

This works well for a couple of reasons.

The oil helps to modulate the strong taste and energetics of the garlic. In other words, you can eat a lot more garlic when it is combined with oil, as compared to simply eating the plain whole cloves. I also find that spreading this on bread or a starchy vegetable further helps to mitigate any stomach upset that may occur.

I make this raw garlic mixture when I feel like I am coming down with something or when I have lung congestion. After years of doing this, I can eat an impressive amount of garlic this way! I also like to add some fresh or dried thyme and oregano to this mixture. When eating this for the first time, eat slowly in case it doesn't agree with your stomach. Also pay attention. You'll probably soon notice that your whole body is warming up and that your congestion is lessening. It works really fast!

Here's an example recipe for this but, truth be told, I never really measure this when making it myself.



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What you'll need...

- 1 large garlic clove (or 2 small cloves)
 - 1 tablespoon butter (or other oil of your choice)
 - 1/2 teaspoon thyme (optional)
 - 1/2 teaspoon oregano (optional)
1. Mince the garlic clove and let it stand for 10 to 15 minutes.
 2. Mix the butter, garlic, and optional herbs together. Spread the mixture on bread or a starchy vegetable. Repeat as desired.



#2 Garlic Vinegar or Oxymel

Apple cider vinegar can preserve the fresh qualities of garlic and be a health tonic unto itself. I like this simple preparation at the onset of a cold or flu or to soothe a sore throat. Look for raw and unpasteurized apple cider vinegar – avoid distilled vinegar with apple flavoring. When you add honey to this preparation, it's called an oxymel.

What you'll need...

- 2 whole garlic bulbs or heads
 - 1/4 cup honey, or to taste (optional)
 - 2 cups apple cider vinegar
1. Peel and coarsely chop the garlic and let it sit for 10 minutes. Add it to a glass pint jar until it is 3/4 full.
 2. If using, add the honey. Fill the jar with apple cider vinegar (you may not use all of the vinegar).

3. Stir well. Cover with a glass or plastic lid (the vinegar will corrode a metal lid and ruin the mixture).
4. Let this sit in a cool, dark place. Shake it daily. After about 3 days, I like to start tasting it to see how the flavor is evolving. I like to strain it after 1 to 2 weeks when the garlic flavor is still sharp and strong.

The garlic vinegar or oxymel will be best if used within a year. Take this by the teaspoon or by the shot glass at the onset of a cold or flu.



#3 Garlic-Infused Oil (For Your Feet, Ears, and Chest)

Using garlic oil on your feet or chest is a time-honored tradition for lessening the severity of an illness. It's especially helpful for relieving chest congestion. Many people are surprised to find out that, after they use the garlic oil externally, they end up having garlic breath! However, that's a good sign! It means that garlic's volatile oils are coming out through your lungs, which is helpful for breaking up congestion in the lungs.

For the best results, make this daily as needed (rather than storing it in advance).

What you'll need...

- A few fresh garlic cloves
- Olive oil

1. Finely mince a few cloves of garlic. Let this stand for 10 minutes.
2. Place the garlic in a small jar. Barely cover this with olive oil.
3. Let this infuse for a minimum of 30 minutes, up to 12 hours. Strain really well. (Whole pieces of garlic can burn sensitive skin, so it's important to remove all of it and only use the oil.)

For the feet: Garlic oil on feet is a folk remedy that works great for children and adults like. Just before bedtime, rub the oil onto the patient's feet. Immediately cover the feet with an old pair of socks. And then another pair of socks. Sleep as normal and wash feet in the morning.

For the chest: Rub the infused oil on the front and back of the chest. Put on an old T-shirt or wrap well in towels to protect bedding or furniture. I like to put a hot water bottle or heating pad over this to help the oil to penetrate the skin. Let it sit for at least 30 minutes. You can continue to add more oil as desired.

For the ears: Garlic oil is also great for ear infections (when the ear drum isn't perforated). It can be used on its own or combined with an oil infused with mullein flowers. To use this for an ear infection, I recommend slightly warming the oil and then adding a drop or two into the sore ear canal.



#4 Garlic-Infused Honey

Honey is a tasty and powerful medicine all on its own. In fact, researchers have shown a spoonful of honey to be better at stopping a cough than standard over-the-counter medicines.¹⁰[\[#fn-15166-10\]](#) When we add the wonders of honey with medicinal herbs, we have quite the pairing!

Practically any fresh herb can be infused in honey. Honey is hydrophilic, which means that it pulls the water out from the fresh herbs. What you'll notice is that in a day or two, the infused honey mixture transforms into a thinner liquid, more like a syrup.

I especially love garlic-infused honey. The sharp and pungent taste of garlic enlivens the sweetness of the syrup. I reach for this mixture for a congested cough as well as a sore throat.

Look for local, raw honey for this recipe. If your honey has crystallized, then heat it very gently in a warm water bath in order to get it to a liquid state.

Note: Honey should not be consumed by children under the age of two or used in

excess if you have a metabolic disorder such as insulin resistance or diabetes.

What you'll need...

- About 5 garlic cloves
 - Raw honey
1. Roughly chop the garlic cloves and let them stand for 15 minutes.
 2. Place them in an 4-ounce glass jar; ideally, the jar should be 3/4 full with the garlic.
 3. Next, fill the jar with honey. Stir well. Add more honey if necessary.
 4. The honey will taste like garlic in as little as 2 to 3 days. You can strain the garlic if desired, or keep it in the honey and eat it along with it.

This will keep indefinitely; however, the honey may crystallize over time. If this happens, you can reheat the honey in a double boiler.



#5 Parsley & Garlic Gremolata

Gremolata is an Italian preparation that is very similar to pesto. However, instead of putting the ingredients in a blender to puree until smooth, you finely mince everything in a coarse texture. The result is an explosion of flavor that is delicious on meats and vegetables alike. This is a wonderful way to enjoy lots of garlic daily! It's super simple to make and absolutely delicious.

What you'll need...

- 3/4 cup finely minced flat-leaf parsley (about 1 bunch)
 - 3 garlic cloves, crushed
 - 1 teaspoon minced lemon zest
 - 2 teaspoons lemon juice
 - 1 teaspoon olive oil
 - 1/2 teaspoon salt (I prefer Maldon or another flaky salt for this)
1. Finely mince the parsley leaves (I use some stems if they are young and flexible) and place them in a small bowl.
 2. Add the crushed garlic, lemon zest, lemon juice, and olive oil. Mix well and add the salt.
 3. Taste the mixture at this stage. Does it need more lemon? Garlic?
 4. Adjust to your preference. Enjoy within the day.

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[https://learningherbsmedia.s3.amazonaws.com/Leaf-To-Fight-Cold_recipe-card.pdf]

Now I'd love to hear from you!

Do you love to use raw garlic? Which of these are you inspired to try? Do you already have a favorite preparation?

Please share in the comments below.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rosalee". The letter 'R' is large and features a prominent loop at the top. The rest of the name is written in a fluid, connected cursive style.

A close-up photograph of garlic. In the foreground, several individual garlic cloves are scattered on a light-colored wooden surface. Some cloves are whole, while others are partially peeled, showing their white, papery skin. In the background, a whole garlic bulb is visible, slightly out of focus. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the textures of the garlic and the wood.

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About the Author - Rosalee de la Forêt



Rosalee is the Education Director of LearningHerbs and author of the bestselling book *"Alchemy of Herbs: Transform Everyday Ingredients Into Foods & Remedies That Heal."* She's a registered herbalist with the American Herbalists Guild and she teaches students from all over the world how to confidently use medicinal plants. Explore more herbs with Rosalee at her [website](#), Herbs with

Rosalee, where you can get her free course, How to Choose the Best Herb For You.

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COMMENTS



Tilak Mehra 16 hours ago

Very informative. must be tried

REPLY



Jo-Ann Barbara Fraser 16 hours ago

Great recipe ideas! Have tried the garlic honey ferment. Tasty and healthy! Thanks!

REPLY



Louis 16 hours ago

Thank you for generously sharing. I really can't wait to prepare the garlic vinegar or oxymel.

REPLY

A couple of questions: What is the recommended dose for the garlic infused honey?



Karin Rose 15 hours ago

I use a spoonful several times a day when having symptoms. For children over age two, I use a small spoon. For adults, I use a big spoon.

REPLY



Hilda Anderson Phillips 16 hours ago

Would garlic be effective if prepared in a tincture?

REPLY



Karin Rose 15 hours ago

REPLY

That's a good question. I have never used a garlic tincture as I prefer to eat my garlic. Let us know if you give it a try!



Kris 15 hours ago

I'm planting about 100 garlic cloves today.

REPLY



Margaret Newlen 15 hours ago

Would roasting the garlic as a whole, be beneficial, or should it always be raw? Thank you, this was great information as always

REPLY



Karin Rose 15 hours ago

REPLY

*In the article above, Rosalee encourages use of raw garlic for colds & flu...
To fight colds and flu with garlic, I strongly prefer raw garlic. (Many of the studies I've cited in this article were using aged garlic extract.) Garlic powder and cooked garlic don't have the same effects in regard to immunity (although it is wonderful for heart health and digestion, but that's a whole other article).*

iz parshaw 15 hours ago



REPLY

Will garlic's cold remedial benefits carry over to my baby through my breast milk? If so, what is the best method for consuming garlic when using to fight a cold your (exclusively) nursing baby has?



REPLY

Karin Rose 14 hours ago

Those are good questions. In my experience, babies get fussy about breastfeeding when mom has had extra garlic. Babies tend to run hot already, so the extra heat could be irritating for them. With my own baby, I used chamomile a lot, which tends to be more neutral energetically. You may find some other helpful ideas in this blog for yourself:

<https://learningherbs.com/remedies-recipes/natural-home-remedies-for-cold-and-flu/>

Best wishes!



REPLY

Yooper girl 3 hours ago

I make garlic salve for my nursing babies and toddlers. I put it on their feet and cover in socks. Works very well. You can put on the chest and back but not if the little one has sensitive skin like my youngest. I add vitamin C/zinc to my intake and hope that goes to my milk. Whether it does or not, I can't be sure, however most all the colds my kids get are mild.



REPLY

Elisabeth 14 hours ago

Thank you! You motivated me to plant some garlic :) The oil on the feet seems very interesting.



REPLY

Rebecca Maas 13 hours ago

Hello. Thank you for the article. I pickle raw garlic and then my family and I eat it straight from the jar. Would the pickling process cook it

enough that it would not be considered raw and therefore have a little less positive effects?



Karin Rose 7 hours ago

REPLY

In the article above, Rosalee encourages use of raw garlic for colds & flu...

To fight colds and flu with garlic, I strongly prefer raw garlic. (Many of the studies I've cited in this article were using aged garlic extract.) Garlic powder and cooked garlic don't have the same effects in regard to immunity (although it is wonderful for heart health and digestion, but that's a whole other article).

Your pickled garlic is probably still good for you, perhaps just not quite as effective for immunity as truly raw. If you have a cold or flu and feel chilled, maybe reach for one of the above recipes.



Julie 12 hours ago

REPLY

Fantastic info! Thanks, we are about to harvest our first organic, sustainably grown garlic crop of 300 plants, so excited to be trying all the recipes out soon.



Sladjana Herceg Bjelac 11 hours ago

REPLY

Hello! Thank you very much for the article, and new fresh recipes.



Chris Mortimer 6 hours ago

REPLY

Whenever I feel that tickle in the back of my throat that precedes a cold I eat a clove of raw garlic with a spoonful of honey. I usually do it twice a day and usually not more than 2 days. I've never had a cold when I do

this.



REPLY

Cathy 3 hours ago

Greetings...for many years, I find a way to serve raw minced garlic at least once daily. The easiest way is to put it on an egg, immediately as it is served, between the cheese and butter. That diminishes the intensity of the strong fresh, raw garlic. It tastes GREAT! .. And it has been years since I have felt the symptoms of the “common” viruses and other pathogens. (I would use bread, but we don’t eat anything with grains).

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