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NEWSLETTER**

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March 2024

Alcohol-free drinks: are they actually good for you?

Most people would assume that an alcohol-free wine is healthier than a full-strength wine, but does it have inherent health benefits as well? Or is it just 'less bad' than the alcoholic options?

If you're choosing between an alcoholic wine or beer and a non-alcoholic one on the basis of health, the alcohol-free version wins hands down. Here's why:

1. You avoid the damage of alcohol

Any drink which doesn't contain alcohol will, logically, allow you to avoid all the many health issues caused by alcohol.

These include but are not limited to: headaches and hangovers, higher levels of anxiety and depression, weight gain, sleep

loss, liver disease, higher blood pressure, heart disease and several forms of cancer.

Remember, alcohol is a Group 1 carcinogen, which causes long-term damage to your body.

2. You get even more antioxidants

Many people say they drink wine for the health benefits of the antioxidants, particularly polyphenols such as resveratrol.

Polyphenols are a plant chemical linked with lowered blood pressure, improved response to insulin, and reduced oxidative stress. All these effects could help decrease the risk of heart disease.

Alcohol-free wines have the same polyphenols as regular wine—sometimes even more.

Plus, the removal of alcohol gives the antioxidants a chance to work on your immune system.

3. You'll consume fewer calories

The alcohol-free versions of most alcoholic drinks are, by and large, lower in calories. For wines, beers and spirits, the zero version contains around a third to half the calories.

However, you need to keep in mind three things:

A. What you mix it with. If you're drinking alcohol-free spirits and you're mixing it with a lemonade, cola or tonic, you're still consuming a lot of sugar.

B. What else is added. Just because it's non-alcoholic doesn't mean it's low in sugar or additives. Always read the ingredients.

C. How much you have. It's easy to knock back more alcohol-free drinks than you would an alcoholic drink.



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20 March is International Day of Happiness, a global event organised by the United Nations. The ultimate goal is to spread awareness that progress is not only about increasing bottom lines and encouraging economic growth, but wellbeing and human happiness as well. Find out more at nationaltoday.com/international-day-happiness/

Fit Facts vs. Fiction: Busting 6 Exercise Myths

If you announce to your friends that you want to get fit, you're likely to receive a contradictory mix of advice, some of it based more on myths than scientific evidence. Many exercise myths have gone unchallenged for decades. Here we separate fact from fiction so you can set your friends straight – and reach your goals faster.

Myth #1: Spot reduction for targeted fat loss

One prevalent myth is the idea of spot reduction. This is the belief that you can lose fat from a specific area of your body by targeting that body part during exercise. Many people spend hours doing crunches, hoping to magically melt away belly fat.

Dr Nick Fuller from the University of Sydney's Charles Perkins Centre says categorically, "Spot reduction is a myth—we can't control where our bodies lose fat."

Dr Fuller points to a number of studies, including a 2021 meta-analysis of 13 studies involving more than 1,100 participants, which found that localised muscle training had no effect on localised fat deposits. In other words, training one area of the body does not reduce fat in that part of the body.

"The fat stores we're using for energy when we exercise come from everywhere in our bodies—not just the areas we're targeting for fat loss," says Dr Fuller.

However, says Dr Fuller, you can achieve the results by targeting overall fat loss through diet and exercise.

Myth #2: The "Fat-Burning" Zone

Some friends may have told you about the so-called "fat-burning" zone, the idea that you burn more fat by exercising at a lower intensity.

However, numerous studies have shown that high intensity interval training, or HIIT, reduces more fat than steady-state low intensity exercise. This form of exercise involves short bursts of super intense movement to increase your heart rate to at least 80 per cent of your maximum, followed by short periods of lower intensity movements.

A 2011 study published in the *International Journal of Obesity* found that high intensity exercise significantly reduces subcutaneous fat, that is, the fat that's visible just under the skin, especially abdominal fat. Other studies published in *Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism*, and the American Heart Association's *Circulation* journal, both in 2008, found HIIT also reduces total body mass and VO2 max, a marker of physical fitness.

Myth #3: No Pain, No Gain

The age-old adage "no pain, no gain" is deeply ingrained in fitness culture, but it's not entirely accurate.

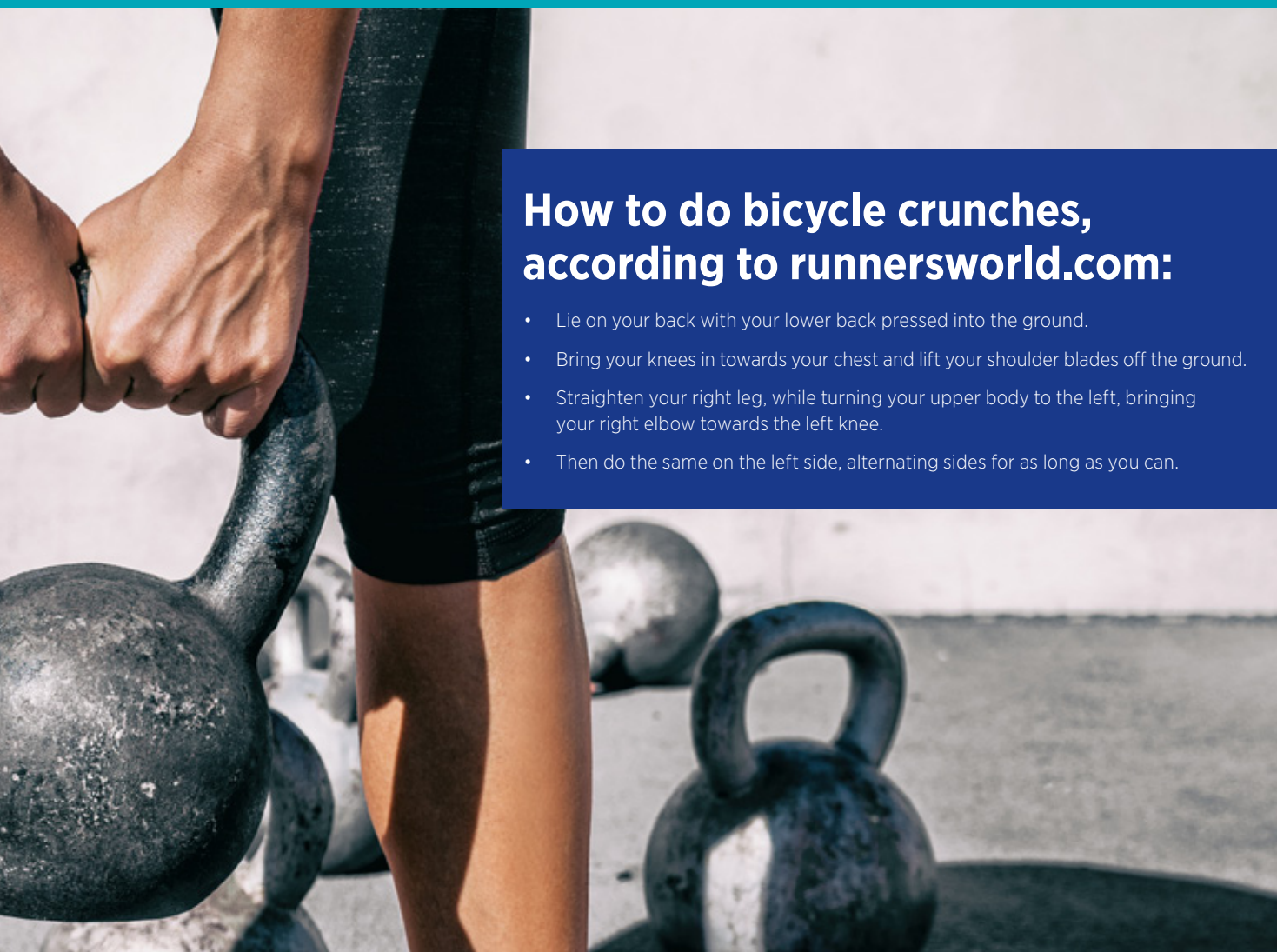
The phrase was made popular by Jane Fonda in her 1980s workout videos. Now, there's more understanding that there are different types of pain during exercise, and most pain is information from your body that something isn't right.

Some pain is good. When you train your muscles, you cause micro-tears in your muscle fibres, so they grow back stronger. This involves some pain, especially when you're changing your workout routine. However, overtraining can lead to injuries and burnout. A well-rounded fitness routine should challenge you without causing persistent pain.

Myth #4: Sit-ups for six-pack abs

Crunches have long been synonymous with achieving rock-hard abs, but they're not the magic solution.

A 2022 study published by the American Council on Exercise ranked best and worst abdominal exercises in order of their effectiveness.



How to do bicycle crunches, according to runnersworld.com:

- Lie on your back with your lower back pressed into the ground.
- Bring your knees in towards your chest and lift your shoulder blades off the ground.
- Straighten your right leg, while turning your upper body to the left, bringing your right elbow towards the left knee.
- Then do the same on the left side, alternating sides for as long as you can.

The study covered exercises from the traditional crunch to an ab roller, on 30 healthy men and women aged between 20-45. They found the most effective was the bicycle crunches (see box above). The second most effective was the "captain's chair", which doesn't involve lying down crunches at all (See side box).

For overall strength, compound exercises like squats and deadlifts engage the core more effectively than isolated abdominal exercises.

Myth #5: Women should avoid weightlifting to prevent bulking up

This myth perpetuates the idea that women should stick to cardio to avoid becoming too muscular. However, that causes women to miss out on the many health benefits of strength training.

On the other hand, Australian sports scientist, Dr Tony Boutagy, says it's not true that women can't bulk up if they want to.

"Muscle that's exhausted at any repetition range will get bigger, no matter what gender you are."

But, says Dr Boutagy, women's lower testosterone levels will limit how far they can bulk. He also says most women don't eat enough calories and protein to get to body builder size. Female body building requires years of daily commitment in terms of weight training and diet.

Myth #6: The more, the better

Some believe that the longer and more frequent your workouts, the better the results. Yet excessive exercise not only leads to diminishing returns, but can damage your health.

Overtraining can result in fatigue, decreased performance, and an increased risk of injury. What's more, according to Australian cardiologist Dr Ross Walker, too much exercise can cause chronic damage to your muscles—and to your heart.

"The dose of exercise for health should be somewhere between three to five hours per week," says Dr Walker.

Remember, there's no one-size-fits-all approach to exercise, so listen to your body, move in a way that feels good, and enjoy the journey to a healthier, fitter you.

How to do the captain's chair at home

The 'captain's chair' is usually found at a gym, and is a frame that allows you to stand and lean on your arms while raising your legs. However, you can do a modified version at home.

[Watch a demo video on youtube](#)

Here's how to do it sitting on a chair at home, according to Dr Michael White, physical therapist:

Step 1: Sit up straight and grasp the edges of your seat.

Step 2: Slowly lift your feet off the floor. Move your knees toward your chest.

Step 3: Squeeze your abs at the top and slowly lower your feet back to the floor.

Step 4: Repeat for up to 30 repetitions.



NO!
~~YES~~

Are you a people pleaser?

Do you want people to see you as 'good', always put others' needs first and go out of your way to make life easier for everyone? If so, it may come at a cost.

Being warm, kind, and agreeable are positive traits and an important part of being in nurturing relationships. But they can become problematic if you don't develop healthy boundaries.

"A lot of the time I didn't like myself," says Natalie Lue, a relationship expert based in the UK, who describes herself as a recovering 'people-pleaser'. "I really had this fear of saying no."

Lue, author of the book *The Joy of Saying No*, says "people-pleasing is when we suppress and repress our own needs, desires, expectations, feelings and opinions to put others ahead of ourselves so that we can gain attention, affection, validation, approval and love.

"Or we do it to avoid conflict, criticism, additional stress, disappointments, loss, rejection and . . . abandonment."

Trying hard to make others happy comes at a cost, says clinical psychologist Jennifer Guttman, writing in *Psychology Today*. She says people-pleasing behaviour can lead to resentment and frustration, problems with decision making, and low self-worth.

Putting in boundaries

If you recognise yourself as a people pleaser, Guttman recommends some simple exercises.

- **Practise saying 'no'.** This is a hard one for many of us, but it doesn't have to come across as uncaring. Assertive communication can be done in a firm but respectful way, says Guttman. Try statements like: "I would really love to be able to help you, but unfortunately I'm already committed at that time."
- Lue suggests you don't start by saying 'no' to everything. She also discourages trying your first 'no' on someone you're most afraid of telling 'no', such as a parent or partner.
- **Don't offer.** Try to stop offering, doing things, or advising, unless you're specifically asked, advises Guttman. While this may be difficult if you're used to anticipating other

people's wants or needs, use restraint and wait to be asked.

If you're unsure, Guttman suggests doing something called a 'resentment check-in'. When someone asks you to do something, do a body scan and ask yourself: "Were this behaviour never to be reciprocated or validated in any way, do I feel a twinge anywhere in my body?" If you feel a twinge, delegate, edit, or deny the request. If you don't then go ahead and accept.

- **Make a decision by yourself.** If you're used to making decisions in agreement with others, Guttman suggests you practise making small independent decisions, building up to bigger ones. Remind yourself that you don't always have to please everyone with your decisions. Start small, for example, by picking a restaurant, then work your way up to larger decisions as you feel more competent and confident in yourself.

Finding help

If you struggle to set boundaries and speak up for yourself, seek support from a trusted professional such as your doctor, a psychologist or counsellor.



What NOT to say to someone with anxiety

If you want to keep the conversation going with someone with anxiety, there are some phrases to steer clear of.

We all worry, and we all get anxious. These are normal responses when we feel under pressure, and they usually pass.

But if you have an anxiety condition, the anxious feelings don't go away, don't have a clear cause, or make it hard to cope with daily life. Anxiety conditions affect one in four people in Australia.

Choose your words

If someone you care about experiences feelings of anxiety, it's common to feel unsure about how to help and what to say. And despite your best intentions, attempts to give reassurance can backfire if you use these phrases:

1. "Calm down"

"Telling a person who is feeling anxious to calm down or stop feeling anxious can make a bad situation worse. It's like telling

someone who is standing in the rain to stop feeling the rain," says Jeffrey M Cohen, an assistant professor of medical psychology at Columbia University Medical Center.

Psychologist Jade Wu, writing in *Psychology Today*, agrees. "Variations of this crowd favourite include 'Relax!' and 'Just breathe'. If I could don't you think I already would have?" she says.

"The problem is that when people are anxious, it's hard to relax," says Wu.

"They're experiencing activation of their sympathetic nervous system, also known as the fight-or-flight response. This is a real and urgent biological process that automatically raises their heart rate and adrenaline levels, stiffens their muscles, and puts their senses on high alert."

When you're in this state reasonable thinking goes out the window, so you can't just tell a person to 'cool it'. Not only is this almost impossible, says Wu, it also invalidates their experience, and you can come across as condescending and uninterested in what's happening for them.

What to say instead

Beyond Blue says it's natural to want to solve the problem to make the person feel better. However, the most helpful thing you can do is listen, and give the other person space to talk and feel heard. Some things you can say include:

"I'm here for you." Anxiety and depression can make people feel isolated, so it can really help to know someone will be there for you during recovery

"I can see this is a really hard time for you." Acknowledging the difficulties of anxiety and depression is one of the most helpful things you can do.

"I'm not sure what to do, but I'm sure we can figure it out together." You may not have all the answers, but what's important is that you're willing to stick around and help them work out how to start feeling better.

"I know it doesn't feel like it now but there's hope that things can get better." Remind them that anxiety and depression are treatable, and with the right support most people recover.

Highlight the importance of seeking professional support. Beyond Blue says often the best place to start is the person's regular doctor, who can refer them to a specialist mental health practitioner. A GP can also write a mental health treatment plan and assist in finding a psychologist.

2. "Stop worrying about it"

"This response is unconstructive," says Sabrina Romanoff, a clinical psychologist at Lenox Hill Hospital, New York. "It implies the person suffering from anxiety is choosing this response. It places the blame on the person struggling and suggests they can freely turn it on and off like a light switch."

Trying not to think about what's causing them anxiety isn't a proven relief method. In fact, telling someone to just 'not think about' whatever is worrying them will only irritate them further.

Dust dangers at work

More than just a nuisance, dust is hazardous to your health and can be a problem in almost any industry.

We tend to associate dust with the construction and mining industries, but you can be exposed to dust in a variety of workplaces.

Depending on your workplace, dust can contain a range of materials including sand, dirt, pollen, minerals, wood, micro-organisms, and vehicle and industrial exhausts.

According to WorkSafe Queensland, you can get exposed to dust through a variety of tasks, including:

- weighing loose powders
- cutting materials (such as paving stones and concrete)
- crushing and grading
- milling, grinding, sanding down or other similar operations
- cleaning and maintenance work
- working with livestock and animal waste
- clearing up spillages.

What are the risks?

Dust particles range in size from relatively large to very small. Large particles fall to the ground quickly, but smaller particles can stay airborne and be inhaled, causing irritation to the nose, mouth, and throat.

Extremely small particles can be breathed deep into the lungs and lead to lung damage, including serious diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease,

lung cancer and silicosis. Australia's Work Health & Safety Ministers recently agreed to a ban on engineered stone, commonly used for kitchen benchtops. Exposure to silica dust from cutting, grinding and polishing engineered stone has led to a rapid increase in the number of Australian workers developing the potentially fatal lung disease silicosis.

Dust exposure can also irritate the skin, eyes, and gastrointestinal tract, and if the lungs are affected, this can also put extra strain on the heart.

Reducing dust in the workplace

To reduce dust, first try to perform the task in a way that doesn't generate dust. If this is not possible, other control methods should be introduced, such as:

- use of wet processes to reduce airborne dust, such as spraying cutting surfaces with water
- using dust removal tools and vacuums such as on-tool extraction and local exhaust ventilation systems
- using the right tools that match the material, to help minimise unnecessary dust
- ensuring adequate ventilation that removes indoor air and brings in fresh air
- cleaning the workplace regularly
- wearing suitable personal protective equipment (PPE) such as safety glasses, respiratory masks, and gloves.



Ask an expert about ...

Q Is there a link between hearing loss and dementia?

Studies have shown that hearing loss can increase the risk of developing dementia by up to five times, says Hearing Australia, with the greater the hearing loss, the greater the risk. And decline in memory and thinking capabilities happens up to 40 per cent faster in those with a hearing loss compared to those without.

Hearing Australia says one possible reason for the link is to do with overtaxing the brain. When our ears receive sounds, they send them on

to the brain to make sense of them. If the messages the brain receives aren't clear, it has to work harder to understand them. This can result in the brain being overworked and, in time, the working memory becomes weakened.

People with a hearing loss are also more susceptible to social isolation, known to heighten the risk of dementia.

Lower your risk

Managing hearing loss can reduce your risk of developing dementia, particularly

if it's treated early on. So, whether or not you have an existing hearing loss, regular hearing checks are important to monitor any changes in hearing so they can be treated.

If a hearing aid is recommended, make sure you use it as much as possible to reduce the strain on your brain. Hearing aids take away the over-taxing of the brain, making it easier to process information.

World Hearing Day is on 3 March

App of the month

BetterSleep

BetterSleep focuses on helping you achieve high-quality sleep by creating and maintaining effective sleep routines. The app features a wide

variety of calming soundscapes to help you fall asleep, including nature sounds, music, meditations and bedtime stories. BetterSleep also offers bedtime reminders so you can start your evening routine and drift off to sleep at your preferred time every night, as well as timers, which turn off the app after a set time. It can also monitor and record your sleep, so it can track how long you sleep and record sounds such as snoring or restlessness.

Limited free version with in app purchases, available from the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

Friday 15 March is World Sleep Day

News Bites



Type of carbs more important than quantity

Many of us have heard that 'cutting carbs' is a fast track to weight loss. But a new study adds to the evidence that it's the right kind of carbs that really matters.

In a large study of over 136,000 US adults over 25 years, on average participants gained about 1.5 kilos every four years. Intake of refined grains, added sugar (including sugar-sweetened drinks) and starchy vegetables (like potatoes) was associated with higher weight gain. Fibre-rich foods such as wholegrains, fruit and non-starchy vegetables, was associated with lower weight gain. The authors concluded that to avoid the typical weight gain with advancing years, making smart choices about your carbs really makes a difference.



Quitting smoking at any age is worth it

Quitting smoking long term has big benefits, according to a study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*, in which researchers investigated the chances of death for over 430,000 people in the US. For former smokers, the rate of death from smoking 10 years after quitting was reduced to one-third that of continuing smokers. And after 20 to 29 years, the death rate was similar to that of people who have never smoked.

Walking pace linked to lower risk of diabetes

Walk a little faster and you'll lower your risk of developing type 2 diabetes, say researchers. Even a walking speed of only 4 km/hour has been linked to a significantly lower risk of the condition. But ramp up your pace, say researchers, as every 1 km/hour increase in speed is associated with a 9 per cent reduction to that risk.

The global number of adults with type 2 diabetes is currently 537 million, and expected to reach 783 million by 2045, so any easy way of helping to stave off the disease will be beneficial.

The researchers, who published their findings in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, reviewed research including over 500,000 people from 10 studies. They found that moving 3-5 km/hour was associated with a 15 per cent lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes, irrespective of the time spent walking. At 6 km/hour, that reduction rose to 39 per cent.

Walking speed is an important indicator of overall health and functional capacity. Faster walking speed is associated with better cardiorespiratory fitness and muscle strength, both of which are linked to diabetes risk. Brisk walking is also good for weight loss, which helps to improve insulin sensitivity.

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THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Daydream

Daydreaming, often dismissed as a distraction, is a mental activity with surprising health benefits. Beyond providing a momentary escape from the demands of daily life, daydreaming has been linked to improved cognitive function and enhanced creativity.

Research suggests that allowing the mind to wander fosters problem-solving skills and encourages innovative thinking.

Reduce your stress and boost your mood

You probably do it instinctively, but it turns out that daydreaming has a positive impact on stress reduction. Engaging in pleasant and imaginative thoughts during moments of relaxation can lower cortisol levels, the hormone associated with stress.

Daydreaming has also been associated with enhanced memory consolidation. During these mental wanderings, the brain consolidates and organises information, potentially aiding in learning and memory retention.

Improve your problem solving ability

When your mind is allowed to wander freely, it can make connections between seemingly unrelated ideas, leading to novel insights and solutions.

During daydreaming, the brain engages in what psychologists call "incubation", a process where the subconscious mind continues to work on a problem even when the conscious mind is at rest. This incubation period allows the brain to consider alternative perspectives, and generate new ideas and think divergently.

Research has shown that people who take breaks and engage in mind-wandering during tasks requiring creativity often demonstrate improved problem-solving abilities compared to those who remain intensely focused.

EAT SMARTER

Fresh ginger

Fresh ginger isn't just for stir fries, it's a nutrient-packed powerhouse that can do wonders for your wellbeing. Here are eight reasons to eat more fresh ginger:

1. Digestion

Ginger contains gingerol, a bioactive compound that kickstart the digestive process, reducing bloating, indigestion, and nausea. That's why so many motion-sickness supplements include ginger.

2. Anti-inflammatory

Gingerol is also a powerful anti-inflammatory compound. Anti-inflammatories can potentially lower the risk of chronic diseases like arthritis and heart conditions.

3. Immunity

Ginger is a nutrient-packed immunity booster. Rich in antioxidants, it strengthens your body's defenses, helping you fend off common colds and flu.

4. Pain relief

Ginger is often used as a natural pain reliever, and clinical trials have shown it's effective in reducing pain, although more research is required. Its analgesic properties make it effective in soothing various types of pain, from menstrual cramps to muscle soreness.

5. Mood booster

Research suggests ginger can positively impact mood by influencing serotonin levels in the brain. Chemicals found in ginger can interact with the serotonin receptor responsible for antidepressant effects.

6. Weight management

Ginger can help you manage your weight by promoting a feeling of fullness. Additionally, its thermogenic properties can give your metabolism a gentle boost.

7. Cognitive clarity

Ginger's antioxidants are thought to protect your brain against the oxidative stress behind neurodegenerative diseases including Parkinson's and Alzheimer's Disease.

8. Nutrient-rich

Ginger contains essential vitamins and minerals like vitamin C, B6, and potassium, making it a wholesome addition to your diet.



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