

How taking ginger can help to ease nausea for chemotherapy patients

LONG hailed as a remedy for motion and morning sickness, ginger has now been proven to reduce nausea in patients undergoing chemotherapy, writes Caroline Bellamy.

Nausea is a common side effect of chemotherapy, affecting about 70 per cent of patients, and many are given anti-nausea drugs to combat it. However, a study by a New York university found that small doses of ginger alongside these drugs can reduce queasiness by up to 40 per cent.

Although researchers cannot pinpoint why ginger — the stem of the plant *Zingiber officinale* — reduces nausea, one theory is that its compounds inhibit the release of a chemical that causes vomiting.

'Agents used in chemotherapy such as cisplatin are thought to cause the gut to secrete a neurotransmitter called serotonin which, when it interacts with certain receptors in the brain, can cause vomiting,' says Professor Ian Rowland from the University of Reading.

'Studies have shown that gingerol, the main compound in ginger which contributes to its pungent taste, can inhibit the release of serotonin so this seems a likely mechanism for the anti-nausea effect.'

Another theory from previous studies is that ginger may inhibit two enzymes, cyclooxygenase and 5-lipoxygenase, that play a role in inflammation and may therefore alleviate swelling in the gut.

Ginger is not actually a root but a rhizome — or underground stem — native to South-East Asia and used in alternative medicine for thousands of years. Although many of its uses centre on digestive illnesses, it



Benefit: Ginger may block the chemicals that cause vomiting

is also used to treat rheumatism, coughs and colds. 'Ginger appears to have a number of beneficial effects,' says leading nutritionist Elizabeth Weischelbaum.

'The most established is the relief of nausea but there is evidence it has anti-inflammatory effects and can ameliorate symptoms of osteoarthritis.'

'Ginger is also thought to contain compounds that can reduce the risk of some cancers, as well as lower blood pressure and improve circulation. Ginger oil contains the chemical compounds zingiberene and 1-bisabolene which seem to have antibacterial properties.'

In the most recent study, ginger caused no side effects in the 600 cancer patients involved, but experts suggest patients undergoing chemotherapy would be wise to consult their oncologist before trying ginger as the spice can interfere with blood-clotting.

Don't panic! What to do if your child has an accident

TWO THIRDS of parents admit they have no basic first-aid knowledge. Here we outline what parents need to know.

LARGE CUTS AND BLEEDING

■ Apply pressure with gauze to stop the bleeding for at least ten minutes, longer if necessary.

■ Elevate the injured limb above the heart if possible and continue to maintain pressure.

■ Apply a sterile dressing over the wound and maintain pressure.

■ If blood soaks through the dressing, add a second on top.

■ Lay the child down supporting the injury in a raised position and seek medical help.

HEAD INJURIES

Stay calm and follow these steps:

■ Sit the child down and apply a cold compress.

■ If they do not recover within five minutes visit A&E or call an ambulance immediately.

■ If the child loses consciousness for a short time and then recovers fully, they are probably concussed. Call your doctor at once.

FOREIGN OBJECTS IN EYE

■ Sit the child down with their face to the light, tell them not to rub it and let it water with tears.

■ If the object is on the white of the eye, try to wash out by pouring clean water into inner corner.

■ If the object remains, moisten the corner of a tissue or handkerchief and dab until the object sticks to the material.

■ Do not touch an object that sticks to the eye or is embedded in the eyeball — seek medical attention immediately.

SWALLOWING OBJECTS

■ Reassure child so they don't panic.

■ Find out what was swallowed.

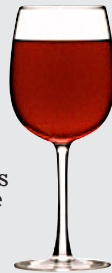
■ If the object was small and smooth, go to A&E.

■ If large and sharp, call 999.

HEALTH SIGNS:

BAFFLING but innocuous symptoms can often be a sign of an underlying health problem, as forensic scientist JIM CAMPBELL explains.

MOST wines contain preservatives called sulphites, which our bodies can usually digest with the help of a substance called molybdenum. This turns them into a beneficial



BLOCKED NOSE AFTER DRINKING RED WINE

amino acid called taurine. But if you're deficient in molybdenum, the sulphites are not converted properly and irritate the nose and airways. This can be overcome by taking a molybdenum supplement.

■ *THE Body Language of Health is available from bookshops or direct on www.mybodylanguage.com*

No food for 100 days - just soups and shakes

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

followers that is helping obese, serial dieters shed vast amounts of weight with dramatic speed.

With health services struggling to cope with a range of weight-related conditions from diabetes to heart disease, LighterLife has been hailed as a lifeline by some doctors who see it as an alternative to costly weight loss operations such as gastric bands. But others believe it's dangerous — and that the punishing 530-calorie-a-day regime is merely organised starvation.

ONE thing that no one is in doubt about is that LighterLife gets results. The story of how the diet began and the two women behind it is just as remarkable.

Since it was founded in 1996, the LighterLife diet has helped more than 100,000 people successfully lose weight and has an annual turnover of €25million.

It has been operating in Ireland since 2007 and has grown from having just two councillors in Dublin and Maynooth to the current six operating nationwide. Demand has increased massively since the company arrived in the country — no doubt due to Ireland's spiralling weight problems.

The women behind the hottest dieting phenomenon in decades — Bar Hewlett, 60, and Jackie Cox, 57 — had good reason to create such a diet. Bar explains how LighterLife began. 'Jackie and I were friends,' she says. 'We met 20 years ago. I had degrees in science and engineering and Jackie had degrees in psychology and counselling.'

'Both of us were six stone overweight. We were dieting experts — and failures. We started talking about setting up a diet that gave us what we wanted — extreme weight loss that stayed off.'

'We discovered a project at Addenbrooke's hospital, in Cambridge, where scientists were researching emergency food packs for disaster areas. These contained the minimum calories a person would need to keep them alive with all the vitamins and minerals needed to stay healthy, combined with a set level of protein.'

'We thought we could use that for dieters. If that's all you needed to survive, then that's what dieters who needed to lose weight should be eating. We took the emergency food pack, looked at the nutritional content, chose flavours and checked nutritional guidelines for what was safe.' After eight years in development, and

raising the funds themselves, they found a factory to make up the packs 'and began putting people on the diets'.

The key, according to Bar, was creating the counselling programmes. 'We all know what we have to do to lose weight, it's about working out why we don't do it. Jackie and I lost six stone and have kept it off.'

One other enthusiast is consultant gynaecologist and surgeon Liz Adams, a 43-year-old mother of two who lives in Liverpool. She was staggered when she saw one of her usually overweight patients who had dropped an impressive three stone in three months, reducing her blood pressure and cholesterol in the process.

Liz, who had struggled with her own weight for six years, was fascinated by the woman's success on the LighterLife diet. As a regular polo player and horse-rider, she had got back down to her normal weight after the birth of her first child Jamie, now six, but was unable to shift the three-and-a-half stone she'd gained in her second pregnancy with her daughter Alexandra, now two.

At 14 stone, Liz says she was constantly tired and lethargic.

'I'd always prided myself on being fit and healthy so I was desperate to return to my pre-pregnancy weight of ten-and-a-half stone,' she says.

'I'd tried the cabbage soup diet, Atkins, low-fat diets — all without success. As a medical professional, I wanted something that was scientifically proven and effective, but also safe and healthy.'

LIZ decided to try the diet in January 2008. By the end of March she had shed three-and-a-half stone taking her down from a size 16 to a ten. More than a year later, she has maintained her target weight of ten-and-a-half stone.

'I still functioned as a surgeon and had no problem getting up early and working long, strenuous days,' she says and now wholeheartedly recommends the diet to her overweight patients.

Ireland is in the midst of an obesity epidemic. A staggering 25 per cent of men and 16 per cent of women are clinically obese. And it is set to worsen. Experts predict that half of the Irish population will be obese by 2050.

But LighterLife is not a diet to be taken on flippantly. To be eligible, you must have a BMI of 29 or above, (those with BMI between

25-28 are offered LighterLife Lite, an 800-calorie a day plan) be over 16 years of age, and have the consent of your GP.

Patients exist on just 530 calories a day — a quarter of the recommended 2,000-calorie intake for women. While gentle exercise such as walking is encouraged, vigorous exercise is not advised because of the low calorific content of the diet. Priced at €95 a week, the diet package is made up of three meals a day of nutritionally complete soups and shakes.

Patients abstain from conventional food for the 100 days of the diet and are encouraged to drink three to four litres of water each day to avoid constipation.

ABSTENTION results in ketosis, the process by which your body converts fats into energy (see box, above right).

The programme is clearly an extreme one and has caused controversy. In December 2008, a mother of five died after drinking nearly four litres of water in two hours while on the plan. Tests showed that Jacqueline Henson, 40, who collapsed, was killed by swelling on the brain — a result of the excessive water consumption.

A coroner ruled her death an accident, but her family blamed the diet. Jacqueline had shed 12lb from her 15 stone frame in her first week and complained of a headache.

The case followed that of Matilda Callaghan, 25, who two years ago died from heart arrhythmia after losing ten stone in six months on the LighterLife plan.

Disturbed heart rhythm, or arrhythmia, occurs when the heart's natural pacemaker develops an abnormal rate or rhythm, the normal blood flow is blocked or another part of the heart takes over as pacemaker. A cardiac pacemaker, drugs or radio frequencies may be used to correct the problem. But in some cases it can be fatal.

Although the coroner recorded an open verdict, leading obesity expert professor John Garrow blamed Matilda's death on her rapid weight loss on LighterLife, which he branded a 'semi-starvation diet', which reduced the lean tissue in her heart.

Dr David Ashton, one of the country's leading obesity experts, says it is highly dangerous for overweight people to exist on fewer than 600 calories a day.

'Losing weight is a very positive thing, but I would never advise my