

Benefits of Sage

Did you know that there is more to sage than just the wonderful, cooling smell it produces? Sage has been used in traditional medicine for many years to treat pain as well as protect the body against oxidative stress, damage due to free radicals, inflammation, and bacterial and viral infections. There is also research that suggests sage contains properties that may provide relief for or cure life-threatening diseases such as dementia, diabetes and cancer. These health claims are due to the research done on antioxidant, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, and anti-tumor effects that various components of sage have on the body. Appropriately, sage's botanical name, *Salvia*, literally means to heal or be well in Latin.

Sage is a hardy perennial that can be grown both indoors and outside in well-draining soil. Grown indoors, keep sage away from drafts in a warm sunny area as it requires 6-8 hours of light daily. Outdoors, sage seeds should be sown two weeks before the last frost date. Plants should be spaced two feet apart and will grow to be between 12 and 30 inches in height. Plant sage near rosemary, cabbage and carrots but keep away from cucumbers.

Sage is a natural source of flavonoids and polyphenolic compounds, which have strong antioxidant and antibacterial properties as well as the ability to hunt down unstable molecules, otherwise known as free-radicals, and deactivate them. Free radicals can build up in cells and cause damage which increases the risk of developing cancer and other diseases. The antioxidants within these two compounds play an important role in protecting the body against oxidative stress, which occurs when there are too many free radicals within cells in the body, and the damage that free radicals induce. Sage also contains ursolic acid, which has the ability to decrease inflammation. Inflammation, especially chronic inflammation, fosters an environment in which tumors can easily grow, therefore, it is vital to target inflammation within the body in order to prevent and treat cancer. In addition to its anti-inflammatory properties, ursolic acid effectively inhibits angiogenesis which is the development of new blood vessels. Based on a quick glance, this may seem like a negative effect, however, solid tumors are reliant on this process for survival, growth, invasion, and metastasis in the body. A result of this angiogenesis inhibition, tumor growth may be slowed. The antioxidant, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, and antitumor effects of sage play a role in reducing inflammatory products in the body that either contribute to or are a result of cancer and may slow down tumor growth thus promoting the consumption of sage in cancer treatment.

We include this herb in our Meals 4 Health and Healing kitchen regularly since there is plenty of information on sage being a very powerful, health promoting plant. The good news about sage is it is very easy to grow and incorporate into our lives. One of our favorite ways to eat sage is to pan-fry it in a little avocado oil and pair it with acorn or butternut squash! Sage leaves also make great medicinal tea.

-Missy Hamilton, Garden Manager, Lexy Vogel, RD, Nutrition Educator, and Savannah Jo Bingaman, current Vanderbilt dietetic intern