

# Nutrition Nuggets: The Magic of Onions

by Delisa Renideo

We're on the trail of magical plant foods. In November, we looked into the magic of micronutrients. In December, we checked out the magic of mushrooms. This fascinating trail continues as we now explore the magic of onions.

When I say onions, I really mean everything in the onion family, including garlic, chives, shallots, scallions, and leeks. These vegetables are all in the allium family, and besides adding wonderful enhancements to the flavor of almost any recipe, they also contribute magical qualities to our health. Our medieval ancestors knew about this and recognized that if they had an infection, they would get well faster if they ate onions and garlic.

Studies show that those who eat more allium vegetables have significantly lower cancer risk than those eating fewer. In fact, the "high consumers," those eating about 1/2 cup per day, had less than half the cancer as the "low consumers," those eating less than a serving per week. Bring on those onions!

What's in onions and garlic that make them fight cancer? When you cut an onion or mince garlic (or any of their cousins), you notice that a strong odor is released. The crushing of the cell walls allow organosulfur compounds, called allicin, to form, which prevents cancer by detoxifying carcinogens. So be sure to cut, chop, or crush any of the allium vegetables before cooking, rather than cooking them whole -- even if you plan on blending them in a soup afterwards. These same compounds also have anti-inflammatory actions that protect us from infections and osteoarthritis.

Remember learning about angiogenesis inhibitors in my previous article about mushrooms? Angiogenesis is the process by which our bodies make blood vessels to deliver nutrients and oxygen to tumors and fat. We can't grow tumors OR fat without providing them with a blood supply. Well, some foods contain angiogenesis inhibitors, which means they prevent tumors and fat from growing, since they need a blood supply. In fact, angiogenesis inhibitors can actually cause tumors and fat to shrink by reducing their blood supply! Sounds like something I want to eat every day!



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Quite a few foods help us by inhibiting angiogenesis. Yes, mushrooms are very good at it. Yay, mushrooms! But the onion family also provides this valuable service.

Other angiogenesis inhibitors include: berries, black rice, cinnamon, citrus fruit, cruciferous vegetables, flax seeds, ginger, grapes, green tea, peppers, pomegranates, quince, soybeans, spinach, tomatoes, and turmeric. Eating these healthy foods in combination with each other actually increases their health-promoting effects, so have fun experimenting with soups and salads where you can eat several of them in one meal. So, as always, the recommendation for good health is to eat a variety of whole plant foods and avoid processed foods and animal products.



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