



SMART SUPPLEMENTS

BY VICTORIA DOLBY TOEWS, MPH

MEDICINAL MUSHROOMS FOR IMMUNITY

BALANCING THE BODY'S SYSTEMS

MUSHROOMS OFFER A LOT OF GOOD NUTRITION IN A FLAVORFUL PACKAGE. SELECT MUSHROOMS HAVE BEEN CELEBRATED IN ASIAN CULTURES FOR THEIR MEDICINAL VALUE FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, WITH THE WESTERN WORLD RECENTLY CATCHING ON TO THE BOUNTY OF HEALTH BENEFITS FROM THE FUNGI WORLD.

Shiitake
(*Lentinus edodes*)

Many of the benefits from medicinal mushrooms focus on boosting immunity and fighting cancer. Mushrooms can be used whole, by incorporating them into cuisine, or active compounds can be extracted and taken in supplement form.

Shiitake (*Lentinus edodes*)

Although native to Japan, China, and other Asian countries, shiitakes are now cultivated globally. This mushroom's rich flavor serves as a ready match for many dishes, including soups, wraps, and stir-fries.

A potent extract rich in polysaccharides from shiitake—called LEM (*Lentinus edodes* mycelium)—comes from the underground part (mycelium) of the mushroom, harvested before the cap grows aboveground. The extract amps up the immune system and has been shown to counteract cancer.

Maitake (*Grifola frondosa*)

This well-loved Japanese mushroom grows at the base of trees, in clusters resembling butterflies in flight.

Its popularity stems from a combination of appealing taste and its reputation for potent healing abilities.

Some foragers have lugged home maitake mushrooms as heavy as 50 pounds, but most are smaller (although still impressive)—about the size of a watermelon.

As with other medicinal mushrooms, maitake contains complex

carbohydrates, known as polysaccharides, which bolster immunity by helping the body's immune system be more vigilant against potential infecting agents. A polysaccharide unique to maitake, called D-fraction, inhibits tumor growth and prevents the start of new cancers in animal model research.

Reishi (*Ganoderma lucidum*)

This mushroom grows wild in China but is cultivated worldwide. For more than 2,000 years, it has been valued as a general tonic and immune booster. More recently, reishi has been investigated for its benefits related to cancer, diabetes, and liver health.

Potent Mushroom Extracts

Numerous extracts from various mushrooms are backed by impressive research for health benefits.

Fred Pescatore, MD, a naturally oriented doctor and author in New York City, points out that AHCC (active hexose correlated compound) could be the world's most researched specialty immune health ingredient. AHCC, which is extracted from shiitake and other mushrooms, offers a powerful way to support the immune system.

"People hear many tips on how to avoid colds, the flu, and other infections throughout the winter months, but the fact of the matter is that germs are difficult to avoid. The key to staying healthy and infection-free is to fortify your immune system so that it is better able to conquer the germs it encounters, and with AHCC you can do that," shares Dr. Pescatore.

Dr. Pescatore notes that clinical trials support AHCC's immune-boosting effect by increasing the number of white blood cells, which could help the body destroy threats such as cancer cells. "Some cancer patients take AHCC as a complement to their chemotherapy in an effort to both keep the tumor from further growth and to ease their side effects," he adds.

Another well-researched mushroom extract, beta glucan, shows benefits for immunity. Taking supplements of beta glucan, a fiber-like complex sugar found in the cell walls of medicinal mushrooms (as well as in oats and barley), results in lower cholesterol levels and may help reduce sick days. In a 2008 study involving firefighters, those taking beta glucan supplements experienced 23 percent fewer upper respiratory tract infections compared with firefighters taking a placebo.

Whatever your preference, chances are you can find a mushroom that fits your desire, from fresh, dried, powdered, tinctures, capsules/tablets, or tea. Consuming the whole, dried mushrooms (the "fruiting body") is the traditional way to use mushrooms. However, the other forms may sometimes be more convenient, and are certainly viable choices.   



Victoria Dolby Toews, MPH, has been a health journalist for more than two decades; her latest book is *Life After Baby: Rediscovering and Reclaiming Your Healthy Pizzazz* (Basic Health Publications, 2012).

SELECTED SOURCES "Baker's Yeast Beta Glucan Supplementation Increases Salivary IgA and Decreases Cold/Flu Symptomatic Days After Intense Exercise" by B.K. McFarlin, et al., *J Diet Suppl*, 9/13 ■ "From 2000 Years of *Ganoderma lucidum* to Recent Developments in Nutraceuticals" by K.S. Bishop et al., *Phytochemistry*, 6/15 ■ *Herbal Medicine: Biomolecular and Clinical Aspects* edited by I.F.F. Benzi and S. Wachtel-Galor (CRC Press/Taylor & Francis, 2011) ■ "*Lentinus edodes*: a Macrofungus with Pharmacological Activities" by P.S. Bisen et al., *Curr Med Chem*, 2010 ■ "Maitake Pro4X Has Anti-cancer Activity and Prevents Oncogenesis in BALBc Mice" by A. Roldan-Deamicis et al., *Cancer Med*, 9/16 ■ Personal communication: Fred Pescatore ■ "Reduction in Circulating Bile Acid and Restricted Diffusion Across the Intestinal Epithelium Are Associated with a Decrease in Blood Cholesterol in the Presence of Oat Beta-glucan" by P. Gunness et al., *The FASEB Journal*, 9/14/16

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