

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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## “Three Stinky Healthy Foods”

Famously odiferous or “stinky” foods can add flavor to your meal. And, they do a lot more for you than leaving you with bad breath. Vegetables in the allium family—onions, garlic, leeks—have a big stinkin’ number of healthful benefits, not the least of which is fighting cancer. In a study, adults who ate high amounts of garlic, leeks, and onions (known as allium vegetables) had a 79% lower risk of developing colorectal cancer than adults who consumed low amounts. Here’s a big stinking plateful of other benefits that these foods offer. Besides adding zesty flavor to soups and salads, and as a tasty topping to burgers, onions are a great source of quercetin, which inhibits low-density lipoprotein oxidation, a process involved in atherosclerosis and coronary heart disease. Maybe an onion a day will keep the doctor away. Other foods, such as apples and tea, also contain quercetin; however, quercetin from onions is absorbed at twice the rate as that from tea and more than three times that from apples. Onions also help to break up platelet aggregation, which is associated with atherosclerosis, cardiovascular disease, heart attack, and stroke. The more pungent the onion, the greater the antiplatelet activity it has. According to the National Onion Association, investigators have shown that increased onion consumption is also associated with lower risk for stomach, bladder, and colorectal cancers. Most of the beneficial compounds in onions don’t form until you cut the onion. Also, the outer layer of the onion (just beneath the paper skin) has the most benefits—so don’t over-peel your onions. Garlic has a multiplicity of uses. It adds a pungent zing to stir fry, roasted chicken, pizza, and pasta dishes. Garlic has been shown to reduce blood pressure levels, lower cholesterol levels, and mitigate other risk factors for atherosclerosis-related diseases. Garlic can benefit people with diabetes and certain cancer types. Researchers reported that garlic supplementation reduced systolic blood pressure and diastolic blood pressure and reduced total cholesterol. Garlic also appears to help people with diabetes. Garlic may also help prevent colorectal cancer and cardiovascular mortality. Also, people who took garlic every day for 3 months had fewer colds. Leeks look like large scallions but have a sweeter, milder flavor. Not surprisingly, leeks are in the same family as scallions—allium vegetables. Eaten regularly, leeks can provide similar cholesterol-lowering and cancer-protection benefits as onions and garlic. Leeks are a great source of kaempferol, also found in broccoli, cabbage, kale, and tea. In many studies, kaempferol significantly inhibited cancer cell growth in a variety of cancer cells, including leukemia, lung cancer, and glioblastoma.

In the America that I love, hold your nose and enjoy your onions, garlic, leeks and shallots.

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