

Letter to Editor

Cardamom comfort

Madam,

Cardamom, often referred to as queen of spices because of its very pleasant aroma and taste, has a history as old as human race. It is especially common in the Indian subcontinent and is known for its delicious aroma, aphrodisiac properties and also as a common folk remedy to treat stomach aches.^[1]

Both in middle east and India, it is used for flavoring hot beverages such as tea and coffee as well as sweets. But the most common use of cardamom in India has been as an excellent breath freshner. It is a common sight to see women folk as well as men popping cardamom pods to make their breath not minty fresh but “cardamom fresh”. It is also an essential component of the traditional betel quid. Cardamom flavored gum was found to be effective in lessening the nicotine withdrawal symptoms in individuals who are trying to quit smoking.^[2]

The oil extracted from cardamom seeds is a combination of terpene, esters, flavonoids and other compounds. Cineole, the major active component of cardamom oil, is a potent antiseptic that is known to kill bacteria producing bad breath and other infections.

Recently, in a study done to explore the antimicrobial effects of cardamom extracts on oral bacteria, it was found that cardamom extracts are effective against oral pathogenic bacteria like *Streptococcus mutans* and *Candida albicans*.^[3]

This brings to us a very interesting possibility-can cardamom be useful as a caries preventive agent? Besides its antibacterial properties, its slightly pungent but pleasant taste stimulates salivary flow and the fibrous outer coat helps in mechanical cleansing of

the teeth. In short, it has all the benefits of a chewing gum and none of its nuisance.

In this era of holistic dentistry, when herbs are being widely explored to discover new alternatives to synthetic antibacterial agents, it is surprising to find no *in vivo* studies, to my knowledge, which explored the possibilities of cardamom in the oral cavity. I hope this letter will prove to be a gentle nudge to steer the researchers in this direction.

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