

Ganoderma lucidum (Reishi Mushroom) Possible Benefits

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November 2013

Bottom Line at the Top: Reishi has a number of potentially beneficial bio-active components, but there is no proof that they achieve the miracles claimed. So far, there are no reported serious adverse effects from consuming it.

Ganoderma lucidum (*G. lucidum*) is a fungus that the Chinese have used for health benefits for thousands of years. It is a tough, bitter-tasting, mushroom that grows on trees. Another popular name for it is reishi mushroom, which is the name I will use in this article, mostly for brevity.

While reishi has been available as an extract or pill for some time, it is now popular as Gano Café or Ganoderma coffee. It supposedly counteracts the addictive property of caffeine.

Health claims for reishi include treatment of heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, gout, cancer, psoriasis, diabetes, viral, bacterial and fungal infections, altitude sickness, liver and kidney disease, fatigue, insomnia, asthma, allergies, bronchitis, stress, poor concentration, chronic fatigue syndrome, AIDS and ulcers. It is supposed to inhibit blood clotting, repair skin blemishes and wrinkles, boost the immune system while reducing inflammation, protect the liver, improve digestion and nutrient absorption, assure nutrient delivery to all of the body's tissues, and negate cancer drug side effects.

As usual, anything that sounds too good to be true isn't. There is no proof that reishi in fact cures these ailments.

The Food and Drug Administration has reprimanded a number of companies selling *G. lucidum* for violating federal law concerning medical claims for food-stuffs. Supplements, herbs and foods can only make those claims if there is scientific proof and FDA approval. Those companies have cleaned up their websites, removing references to specific disease cures, but other, purely informational sites continue to make the claims.

Reishi contains many potentially bio-active substances, including triterpenoids, β -glucans, the mineral germanium, an unusual 19-carbon long-chain fatty acid and fiber-digesting enzymes.

The science:

In animals, reishi reduces allergic inflammation of airways. It boosts anti-oxidant levels and T lymphocyte numbers, which help to fight infection. Proof that reishi confers similar benefits in humans is lacking. Alternative medicine groups claim that reishi cleanses the body of toxins and regenerates liver cells, again without human proof.

Most reishi research has addressed a possible role in cancer therapy. Test tube and animal experiments suggest that reishi induces cancer cell death and reduces aggressive cancer invasion of surrounding normal cells.

Only five trials have compared reishi to either inactive placebo or active cancer medication in humans. None of the studies were of good quality and none recorded whether patients survived or not. Only one showed that reishi had a positive effect, showing that patients who took reishi along with chemotherapy or radiation therapy had better outcomes than those who used Western medicine alone. Reishi by itself conferred no benefit. It

boosted immune function parameters by about 2-3%, which is probably not significant.

The good news is that reishi hasn't yet killed anyone, or, if it has, no one's reported it. The only recorded reishi side effects are dry throat and nose, nausea and insomnia. It might interact with certain medications, such as anticoagulants and some chemotherapeutic agents, so mention this possible interaction to your physician.

If you have cancer, don't rely on reishi alone for your treatment. If you don't have cancer, there is no evidence for or against using reishi to prevent any disease.

Even if reishi won't save you from cancer, it might help save our planet. It contains a huge variety of fiber-digesting enzymes, so it might be used to break down human waste and accelerate industrial sludge processing.