It's hard to think of sage without almost instantly conjuring up images of stuffing, turkey, sausage and other foods. But beyond the spice’s culinary credits and intriguing nonfood uses (ever burned sage in a room to remove negative energies?), sage (*Salvia officinalis*) is a standout herb for your health.

In Latin, *salvia* means "to heal," and in fact 10th century Arab physicians believed that sage's use would contribute to immortality. Sage has been touted as a treatment for many ills, including snakebites, eye problems, infertility, excessive menstrual bleeding, arthritis pain, infections, epilepsy, intoxication, memory loss and intestinal problems.

Since ancient times, wild sage also has been considered a sacred plant by Native Americans and used both medicinally and ceremonially to purify, cure and cleanse.

The following look at medicinal uses provides specific examples of how this herb—available in capsule, liquid and tea forms—can benefit your body.

**DON'T SWEAT HOT FLASHES**

One of the newest and most exciting applications of herbal sage is for the treatment of hot flashes. According to Claudia Joy Wingow, acting chair, clinical division of Tai Sophia Institute Graduate School of Healing Arts in Laurel, MD, sage is particularly good at easing hot flashes during menopause because it naturally inhibits perspiration. The herb may also help balance female hormones, thereby reducing moodiness and insomnia. Some manufacturers offer single sage supplements, but more often the herb is combined with black cohosh or wild yam. (See product picks for single-remedy suggestions.)

**CHASE AWAY COLD SYMPTOMS**

Mary Bove, ND, who practices medicine at Brattleboro Naturopathic Clinic in Brattleboro, VT, advises patients to drink hot sage tea three times a day, and/or gargle or swallow sage tincture (added to water) to relieve upper respiratory, throat, nasal and sinus problems. Research has confirmed the use of sage for sore throats. In a double-blind study published in the *European Journal of Medical Research*, a sage throat spray significantly alleviated sore throat pain compared to a placebo spray.

**SETTLE YOUR STOMACH**

The German Commission E, an organization similar to the FDA, has approved sage for the treatment of nonspecific digestive complaints (as well as an antidote for excessive sweating and inflamed mucous membranes of the throat and nose). David Winston, RH, an author and herbalist based in Broadway, NJ, gets more specific and recommends the herb for relieving gas, nausea and vomiting, stimulating bile production (important for gallbladder health), and inhibiting ulcers and gastritis.

**ENHANCE MENTAL FUNCTION**

Several studies support sage's role in improved mental function, including research done on people with mild-to-moderate Alzheimer's. Other research suggests that sage holds value for improving memory, reducing anxiety and lifting mood.

**DOSAGE GUIDES AND SIDE EFFECTS**

For use as a tea or gargle, steep 1–3g of dried sage (or the equivalent amount of tincture) and take three times daily for symptoms. Follow manufacturer’s directions for capsules or tablets.

Sage is contraindicated during pregnancy and breast-feeding because it can have a drying effect, says Bove. However, once a woman has stopped breast-feeding, sage may be used to help
milk ducts dry up quicker. Having said that, sage can help if you are trying to wean a child off breastfeeding. Work with an herbalist or naturopathic physician before trying this yourself.

Also, the essential oil contains a potential neurotoxin called thujone, and should be avoided by young children, pregnant or nursing women, and people with severe liver or kidney disease.

DID YOU KNOW THAT SAGE...

- Is high in vitamin C and flavonoids (a type of antioxidant).
- Contains tannins, which are astringent, and camphor, a natural antimicrobial.
- Can be applied topically (in cream form) to ease wounds, sprains and muscle injuries, as well as help treat herpes outbreaks.
- Grows in several varieties, including common sage, Mexican or ornamental sage, white sage and pineapple sage.
- Common sage leaves should be used sparingly and their flavor intensifies as they dry. Sage is an important spice in cuisines from around the world, including Italian, German, Middle Eastern and of course American.
- Is an old-fashioned remedy for reducing fevers, cleansing the body and purifying the blood.
- May help clean teeth and strengthen gums naturally.

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