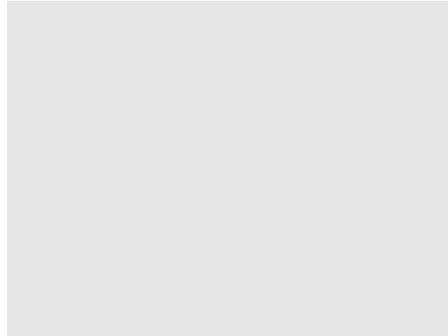


[https://www.reflector.com/features/columnists/mushrooms-may-be-good-medicine/article\\_cf23368e-27c5-596f-9382-5f2350b01c66.html](https://www.reflector.com/features/columnists/mushrooms-may-be-good-medicine/article_cf23368e-27c5-596f-9382-5f2350b01c66.html)

## Mushrooms may be good medicine

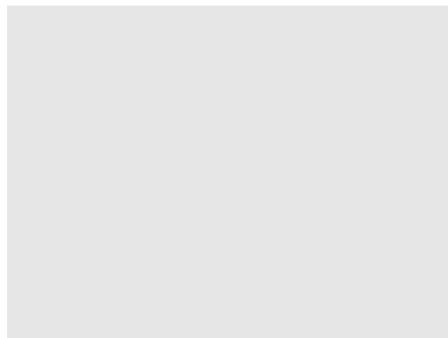
Sep 9, 2020



Kathy

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Deborah Griffin/Daily Reflector//



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Q I have a strong family history of breast cancer. A friend of mine suggests I might want use medicinal mushrooms to reduce the risk. I never heard of medicinal mushrooms. FJ, Winterville.

A Medical students don't typically learn about medicinal mushrooms, but Danielle McLaughlin, a third-year Brody student was game to research this topic. Here is what she wants to share.

People are quick to jump to psychedelics when they hear the term "medicinal mushroom," yet it can simply describe any mushroom with nutritional value. All mushrooms have some amount of nutritional value. Those worth mentioning include the common grocery store mushrooms like Portabella and white

button mushrooms, the species Reishi mushrooms and their dietary supplements, Chaga tea, and exotic or specialty mushrooms.

Broadly speaking, mushrooms are a source of protein, carbohydrates, dietary fiber (“chitin”), vitamins (B2, B3 and D), minerals (potassium, phosphorus and selenium), and beta-glucans. Beta-glucans support the immune system, meaning they assist in decreasing inflammation and protecting your body against bacteria and viruses. Besides vitamin D, the beta-glucan content may be the mushroom’s most significant contributor to health, but there have been too few studies to know what the appropriate dosage might be. The products on the market vary greatly in the amount of beta glucan and other ingredients they contain.

Mushroom supplements come in the form of tablets, capsules, tinctures or granules. The Reishi type is the most popular. A testing company, ConsumerLab.com, performs quality tests and provides consumers with information about health and nutritional products based on the products’ ingredients, marketing and authenticity. Their top choices for mushroom supplements are Real Mushrooms Reishi Extract, Swanson Reishi Mushroom and Nature’s Way Reishi, found at Amazon, Walmart, Walgreens and other vendors of dietary supplements. Another popular nutritional mushroom is Chaga, a type of fungus that grows on the bark of birch trees in cold climates. It is most commonly purveyed in a tea form and promoted as an antioxidant (meaning it protects our human DNA from certain stressors), as an anti-inflammatory, and as a pain reliever. You will find it in some coffee and tea shops.

There is research on the association between using medicinal mushrooms and lowering the risk of cancer, severe neurodegenerative disease (like dementia), and reduced diabetic nerve pain. You mentioned your risk of breast cancer, and there is an observational study report that stated women who used mushroom supplements that included Maitake had lower breast cancer risks. But a recent prospective study had contradictory results, so additional research is needed.

Medicinal supplements typically have a combination of several kinds of mushrooms including Reishi, Shiitake, Turkey Tail, and/or Maitake. There are many proprietary blends on the market but you don’t know how much of each type of mushroom is in it. Experiments done in test tube have shown specialty mushrooms like Krestin, Lentinan (from the Shiitake), and Schizophyllan may inhibit the growth of breast and liver cancer cells and tumor growth but we couldn’t find that they had been tested in humans.

As with any dietary supplement, talk with your physician about the risks and benefits of taking medicinal mushroom or any other dietary supplement.

Locally, expert foragers report finding Lions Mane with its potentially neuroprotective effects, and Maitake *Grifola frondosa*, which we mentioned may inhibit the growth of breast cancer cells. An extensive number of exotic mushrooms believed to have medicinal properties also exist in the culinary form. Oyster varieties, Shiitake, Lion's mane, Velvet Foot and Maitake are used for their meaty texture and earthy, umami flavor.

The books by Paul Stamets, considered a gigantic figure in the mycology world, would be great reading for someone interested in learning more about medicinal mushrooms, including how to grow them. If you are just curious, the story "Magic Mushrooms" in the February 2020 issue of Smoky Mountain Living magazine (<https://www.smliv.com/stories/the-magic-of-mushrooms>.) would be of interest.

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