

Foods that ‘Naturally Thin the Blood’

There are a number of foods and supplements that are known to thin the blood. These include foods with high amounts of aspirin like substances called salicylates, omega-3 fatty acids, foods with natural antibiotic properties and vitamin E supplements.

It is important to note that while many people have problems with blood clots, it is not true that blood thinning foods are desirable for everyone in the population. People taking prescription anticoagulant drugs also need to be careful not to consume too many foods with natural blood thinning compounds in addition to their regular medication.

Blood coagulation should fall within a desirable range. If blood coagulates too easily, clots can form which in turn can lead to adverse health conditions such as heart attacks. However, if blood does not clot enough, conditions such as hematuria (blood in the urine), bleeding from the nose aka (nosebleeds or epistaxis), hemorrhages, heavy periods in women, and bleeding strokes may occur. If a person’s blood is not clotting enough and he has surgery or a traumatic event like a car accident, he could have a serious problem by losing too much blood from wounds or surgical incisions failing to clot properly.

Some of the foods that are generally thought to have natural blood thinning compounds are listed below.

Salicylates

One type of natural blood thinner is substances that block vitamin K. These include salicylates. The most well known of these is aspirin, but many foods, such as preservatives and flavorings, also contain salicylates or aspirin like substances. Some individuals are known to be aspirin or salicylate sensitive, but they can eat more salicylates as long as they eat a balanced amount of vitamin K foods, too. (Vitamin K plays an important role in the body’s in blood clotting processes.

The 'K' in vitamin K gets its name from the Danish word for coagulation.)

Foods that are generally high in salicylates include many spices, most fruit, especially dried fruits, nuts, and also some flavorings and preservatives.

Herbs and spices high in salicylates include:

- Curry powder
- Cayenne pepper
- Ginger
- Paprika
- Thyme
- Cinnamon
- Dill
- Oregano
- Turmeric
- Licorice
- Peppermint

In Ayurvedic medicine many of the above spices are known as 'warming spices'. This may be because by thinning the blood they increase a person's blood circulation, which in turn speeds up the metabolism and makes a person feel warmer.

Fruits high in salicylates include

- Raisins
- Prunes
- Cherries
- Cranberries
- Blueberries
- Grapes
- Strawberries
- Tangerines
- Oranges

Other substance high in salicylates:

- Chewing gum
- Honey
- Vinegar
- Wine
- Cider

Though there are some exceptions, in general most meat, fish, dairy, grains and vegetable foods are not high in salicylates. Many types of fish do however have blood thinning properties due to their omega-3 fatty acid content, as noted below.

A 2001 study published in the European Journal of Nutrition found the salicylate content of organic foods to be higher than conventional foods.

Vitamin E

Vitamin E is an antagonist to vitamin K. Some foods and topical substances these days are preserved with vitamin E. Foods high in vitamin E may not *necessarily* thin the blood, as many foods high in vitamin E, such as spinach and broccoli also contain significant amounts of vitamin K, which tend to clot the blood.

Most medical articles state that people have to take relatively large doses of vitamin E in order for it to have an effect on coagulation; this statement may not be true.

Cruciferous Vegetables?

Bleeding problems can develop from eating too many cruciferous vegetables, specifically cabbage and kale. This is strange, because most cruciferous vegetables are high in vitamin K, which is known to clot the blood. It may be because cruciferous vegetables have anti-estrogenic compounds, which is why they are often recommended as a good food for breast cancer prevention. However, studies show

that estrogen levels tend to go hand in hand with vitamin K levels, in cruciferous vegetables the estrogen lowering properties may also lower vitamin K levels. So for some people, it may be best to avoid excessive amounts of this type of food. Cruciferous vegetables also contain goitrogens, which can lower thyroid levels, another reason some people may need to limit their intake.

Since all cruciferous vegetables seem to have anti-estrogenic properties it is something to consider when meal planning.

Cruciferous vegetables include broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collard greens, kale, kohlrabi, mustard, rutabaga, turnips, and Chinese cabbage, arugula, horse radish, radish, and watercress.

Vitamin B6

Vitamin B6 lowers estrogen levels, and it is well established through medical studies that increased estrogen levels are linked to blood clots. As such, if vitamin B6 does lower estrogen levels, then it may make sense that it may also lower vitamin K levels and thin the blood. Vitamin B6 treatment can cause nose bleed in some people.

Omega- 3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3 fatty acids have received a lot of press lately because of their ability to lower cholesterol levels and make the blood less prone to clotting. Fish oil is usually high in omega-3s and can be ingested either directly or by eating fatty fish. Fish with high amounts of omega-3s include:

- Mackerel
- Anchovies
- Salmon
- Albacore tuna
- Mackerel
- Lake Trout
- Herring

When eating fish, one danger is that many fish have high mercury levels, so experts often have mixed recommendations on exactly just how healthy eating a lot of seafood is for most people.

Additional selected foods with compounds that thin the Blood

- Garlic
- Ginger
- Onions
- Cinnamon
- Olive Oil

Garlic and onions are natural antibiotics that can kill the intestinal bacteria that manufacture vitamin K. Many studies have found that long term prescription antibiotic use can cause bleeding problems due to a vitamin K deficiency. However, for people who seem to always be short on vitamin K, even small amounts of foods with natural antibiotics properties, like garlic and onions, are problematic. When eating garlic, ginger or onion rich food, try to have a salad with lots of leafy green vegetables high in vitamin K as a part of the meal.

James A. Duke, author of several books on herbal medicine, notes that garlic has nine different compounds that are anti-aggregants (compounds that prevent the blood platelets from sticking together).

Alcohol

A study that appeared in the October, 2005 issue of the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research* found that ‘Alcohol consumption is inversely associated with both platelet activation and aggregation.’ Another study, published in 1986 in the same journal, found signs of sub-clinical vitamin K deficiency in a study of 20 male alcoholics. Perhaps not coincidentally, the signs of fetal alcohol syndrome closely resemble the symptoms of vitamin K deficiency in newborns. Red wine is an especially potent as a blood thinner.

Exercise

Based on studies of female athletes, vigorous exercise seems to lower vitamin K levels. Women who are elite athletes, i.e. those who over exercise, instead of being healthy actually are at risk for hypo-estrogenism, osteoporosis and vitamin K deficiency. Vitamin K is necessary to clot the blood, so by logical deduction then it may be prudent to consider the possibility that over exercising may thin the blood since it is known to lower levels of vitamin K.

At the other end of the spectrum, we know that people who remain stationary for long periods, such as people on bed rest, in car trips or travelers on long plane flights, are at risk for blood clots.

By logical deduction then, the table below may illustrate the links between the conditions associated with remaining stationary and the conditions with over exercising, two conditions at the opposite end of the spectrum.

Remaining stationary	<=>	Vigorous Exercising
Blood Clots	<=>	Vitamin K deficiency Thinner blood
Higher estrogen levels	<=>	Low estrogen levels
Increased cancer risk	<=>	Decreased cancer risk

Table showing known links between exercise, estrogen levels, vitamin K, cancer and blood clotting.

Interestingly, a 2003 study from the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center found that blood clots in obese people could be dissolved with regular exercise.

Vitamin D

In Ayurvedic medicine, sunshine is supposed to be good for a person's circulation, which usually means it also thins the blood. As

noted above, other Ayurvedic remedies for improving circulation, such as cinnamon and ginger, have actually been proven in modern medical studies to be natural blood thinners. As such, it would be logical to consider the possibility that if Ayurvedic medicine scholars were correct about the spices thinning the blood, they may have been right about sunshine, too.

Interestingly, a recent medical study found that a clinical trial of a biologically active metabolite of Vitamin D3 demonstrated an unanticipated reduction of thrombosis in cancer patients.

Vitamin D is a fat soluble vitamin that we can obtain in two ways:

- 1) Through food
- 2) It can be synthesized by the body after exposure to sunshine.

This means that sunshine would have the same impact on blood as the vitamin D. If sunshine is found to be a blood thinner, it would confirm what Ayurvedic practitioners have thought to be true for thousands of years.

Cancer and Blood Clots

In Traditional Chinese Medicine cancer is often viewed as a symptom of a circulation problem. In modern, Western medicine, the common assumption is that cancer causes blood clots. Perhaps not coincidentally, many factors that studies show may decrease the risk of cancer also thin the blood. These include sunshine, exercise, aspirin, heparin (a prescription anticoagulant), antibiotics, olive oil, fish oil, turmeric, vitamin E and garlic among others

Summary

It is well known that foods that elevate vitamin K levels, such as lettuce, and greens, may clot the blood. People who are taking anticoagulants are often warned to limit these types of foods so they do not counteract the effectiveness of their medicine.

However, it is often overlooked that many foods and environmental factors, especially those that lower vitamin K levels, may thin the blood. This information may be important for people on anticoagulants to be aware of in order to prevent their blood from becoming too thin.

Some people, have genetic disorders that make them easy bleeders. However it has been found that by controlling the diet and by monitoring how much of the foods listed above is consumed, one can usually keep bleeding problems well under control.