

# The Real "Magic" Mushroom

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At the information session held at "Food Enhancement" in December, Dr. Cameron shared the results of his research, which included red Reishi's effects on cholesterol, blood sugar, and blood pressure. "I've found that it really does a lot of good for the heart," he said. "It's not just about lowering cholesterol, but also about improving the heart's ability to pump blood. It's a very important part of the immune system, and I believe that the best way to keep it healthy is to eat a diet that's rich in antioxidants, like the ones found in red Reishi." Dr. Cameron also mentioned that red Reishi can help with the production of collagen, which is essential for skin health and overall vitality.

As well, Dr. Cameron spoke of red Reishi's many other properties. It's a natural blood sugar management, which helps the body absorb glucose more effectively. It's also a natural cholesterol management, which helps to reduce the risk of heart disease. And it's a natural immune system booster, which helps to fight off infections and diseases. "I think it's important to know that red Reishi is not just a mushroom, it's a powerful natural medicine that can help you live a healthier, longer life."

by Helen Hardisty

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No... not *those* ones!! Though it does appear more than one mushroom can have a profound effect on your body! It's red Reishi, the highly regarded medicinal mushroom, I'm referring to. Why magic? The proven benefits of regular consumption of red Reishi for enhancing overall body health are wide ranging and compelling. Research shows that "red Reishi can enhance the body's ability to combat a myriad of diseases, particularly those that occur more frequently with advanced age."

Two thousand years ago, the Reishi mushroom was first harvested for its healing properties. Its rarity and its many healing benefits helped this mushroom (*Ganoderma lucidum*) earn the title "King of Herbs." The ability to harmonize the functions of the body, mind and spirit and the range of ailments that could be treated, all helped earn a "superior" rating, even higher than the well-known ginseng. Reishi has only been commercially available for the past 25 years and only quite recently in North America .

Last magazine we introduced red Reishi to you with some background information, advice about products and sources, and a primary focus on red Reishi's immune boosting properties. I thought I'd like to investigate this aspect a little more.

Like many people on the North Shore , over the years I have come to depend on Olga Ottens at The Vitamin House in Dundarave, as a valuable resource. Though I try, I find it impossible to keep up with all the latest research on health and I feel comforted that

Olga, who brings a background in scientific research, a healthy skepticism, a lively curiosity and who is a breast cancer survivor, does the legwork for me. Olga often tries out new products, and because she is so attuned to her own immune system, she is able to tell very quickly whether a product is efficacious or not, for her. I asked her about red Reishi. "I am very sensitive to my immune system and I noticed that my blood pressure was more stable, my energy levels were more even (I usually experience a 3:00 pm low - this energy stability happened gradually over a few days) and I had a general feeling of well-being. I should add that I am normally allergic to mushrooms, but probably because this is an extraction, rather than the mushroom itself, I had no reaction." Olga has had a lot of favourable reaction too from customers (it seems to take between five and eight days after beginning the red Reishi, for the benefits to become apparent.)

At the information session held at West Vancouver Library in December, Dr. Cameron McIntyre, a North Shore naturopathic doctor, also extolled red Reishi's virtues, and expanded on them. **He spoke of the immune system as being like a bank account. "We need to add to it every once in a while, so that when we need it, we don't find out we've depleted it, that we have "insufficient funds" to cover our health needs."** Some of these boosters are Red Reishi, Vitamin C (which also helps us absorb the Reishi), plenty of water, fresh vegetables and fruits, essential fatty acids, soy, good quality protein and sleep.

As well Dr. McIntyre spoke of red Reishi's many other properties.

It has several beneficial cardiovascular aspects - it lowers blood pressure, lowers "bad" LDL cholesterol and Triglycerides and promotes blood circulation. Cholesterosis not only quickly leads to arteriosclerosis which is linked with hypertension, stroke, and cardiac attacks, but slows the circulatory system, resulting in stiff joints, insomnia, anxiety, dizziness and fatigue.

It is helpful in blood sugar management. Dr. McIntyre noted that diabetes is on the rise with one of the fastest growing groups being children with juvenile onset diabetes. Red Reishi lowers blood sugar levels dramatically.

The Royal Medical Society in the U.K. has termed red Reishi an adaptogen, meaning that it helps the body adapt to stresses of various kinds. It lowers the fight/flight response and helps to moderate the flow of adrenalin. It also helps improve memory and sharpen concentration.

It supports and enhances liver and kidney detoxification. The liver is our main organ for detoxification. Red Reishi helps the liver excrete toxins and by-products from our systems and appears to aid in the regulatory functions of the kidneys. In fact most of the scientific research conducted supports red Reishi's role as a normalizing substance - a nutritional supplement that can yield medical benefits through its normalization and regulation of the body's organs and functions.

Research on the relation between Reishi and cancer is ongoing but so far it is known to be anti-metastatic, in that it reinforces the membrane of the cancerous cell to impede spreading, and the regular consumption of red Reishi stimulates the production of interferon and interleukins 1 and 11, potent natural anti-cancer substances produced in

our bodies. Red Reishi has been shown to help reduce the side effects of chemotherapy. The polysaccharides have been shown to help with the headaches, nausea and general weakness that accompany radiation and chemotherapy.

Honor Moore, a woman with rheumatoid arthritis, spoke of the side effects of the drugs she has to take once a week which are hard on her system - a low dose of chemotherapy which makes her feel fluey and ill and puts her in bed the day they are administered. Since she has been taking red Reishi daily, the side effects of the drugs have been reduced by half.

The main point I think, is that while medical research and individual case studies have shown red Reishi to be effective in treating numerous conditions, **the greatest proven benefit of regular red Reishi consumption is the enhancement of your body's overall health.** Proponents say they feel noticeably better, with less anxiety, and more pep.

When you're out shopping for Reishi, you'll notice there are black and red varieties available. Black Reishi can be used as a moderate herbal tonic, but is considered to be inferior to red Reishi because of its lower polysaccharide content. Polysaccharides are complex carbohydrates, made up of multiple sugar molecules. Studies indicate that it is these polysaccharides, an active element found in red Reishi, that are responsible for strengthening the body's immune system. In addition, ganoderic acids in red Reishi have also been shown to help alleviate common allergies by inhibiting the chemical mediators of inflammation, including histamine release.

All Reishi products are definitely not created equal. To ensure you are buying the best red Reishi, look for reputable products from Japan such as [Mikei](#) and [Toi](#).

*Helen is a freelance writer, editor and business mentor.*