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Is wheatgrass as groovy as they say it is? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

Is wheatgrass as good as it's claimed to be? I have headaches when I drink it. Why is that???
Thank you very much.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Wheatgrass, a relative of wheat, is grown mostly for hay or is planted for sheep, cattle, or horses to graze. The leaves are harvested within seven to ten days after sprouting. Freshly sprouted leaves can be crushed to make wheatgrass juice or dried and made into tablets or capsules, often in combination with other herbs. Though wheatgrass used as a dietary supplement is generally considered safe for consumption, headaches (as you mentioned), nausea, hives, and even swelling of the throat are all recognized as possible side effects. And, as far as the health claims, there are many associated with this green grass (more on that in a bit). However, while a few studies show promise, the majority of the claims are not backed by scientific evidence.

It is noted that wheatgrass is a concentrated source of many nutrients, including several vitamins, iron, calcium, magnesium, amino acids, and chlorophyll. Proponents of the green stuff claim that it can support immunity, kill harmful gut bacteria, and rid the body of toxins. Along those same lines, wheatgrass is also touted as a treatment for a wide range of conditions, such as anemia, diabetes, infections, constipation, ulcerative colitis ^[2], AIDS, and even cancer. But, Reader beware: many of these supposed claims are lacking scientific evidence.

What has research found? There is a small amount of evidence that supports the use of wheatgrass in the treatment of ulcerative colitis. Another study found that wheatgrass may reduce myelotoxicity (damage to bone marrow) due to chemotherapy in breast cancer patients. Though some studies show promise, more research is needed.

Additionally, because wheatgrass is consumed raw, it can be contaminated with mold, bacteria, or other not-so-groovy substances. This means it's crucial to wash it thoroughly. People who show signs of an allergic reaction (e.g., hives or a swollen throat) are strongly advised to seek medical attention and avoid consuming wheatgrass again. It's also recommended that women

who are pregnant or breastfeeding, folks with celiac disease, gluten intolerance, or a wheat or grass allergy steer clear of wheatgrass. Lastly, it's good to note that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not regulate dietary supplements, and thus, potency and safety may be difficult to determine.

If you enjoy the taste of wheatgrass, and you're headache-free, then feel free to drink up. Wheatgrass isn't, however, a substitute for eating a variety of fruits and vegetables. There are other ways to get the nutrition you need. For more information, check out the *Go Ask Alice! Nutrition & Physical Activity* [3] archive.

Alice!

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