

10 Lion's Mane Mushroom Benefits From Heart to Gut Health

Are lion's mane mushrooms healthy or overhyped? Let's dig into the research.

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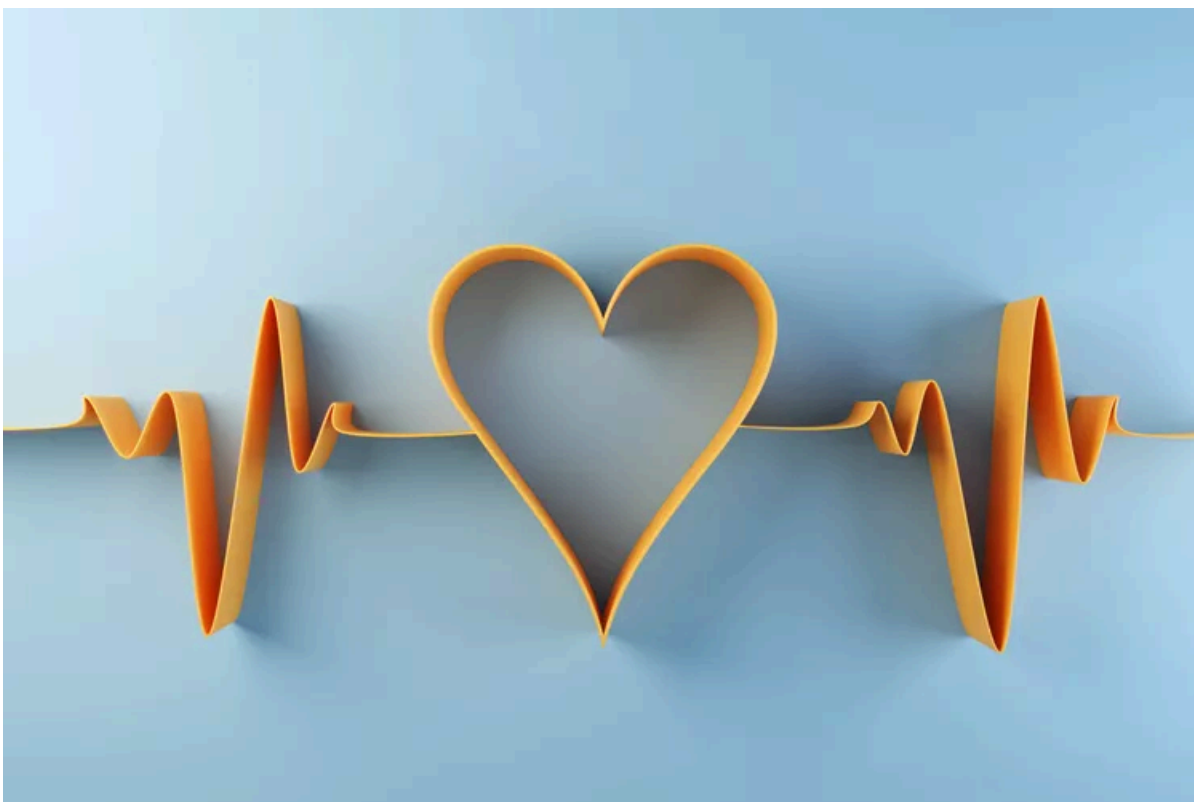


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Lion's mane mushroom benefits have been creating quite a buzz—and with a regal name like lion's mane, how could they not? Whether or not you've heard of them, when it comes to adaptogenic, [functional mushrooms](#), lion's mane tops the list as one of the most popular and well-studied.

But what exactly do “[adaptogenic](#)” and “functional” mean in the context of edible fungi? The benefits touted by lion's mane mushrooms are immune support, boosting brain, heart, and gut health, and more. But are the benefits completely woo-woo, or based in actual science? Here's what to know about the benefits of lion's mane mushrooms, both nutritional and beyond.

What Are Lion's Mane Mushrooms?

Also known as the hedgehog mushroom, or by its scientific name *Hericium erinaceus*, the lion's mane mushroom has a rich history. As a centuries-old cornerstone of traditional Chinese medicine, it was used to improve overall health and longevity.¹ Meanwhile, in Japan, Buddhist monks used the powder of this mushroom to enhance focus during meditation. Evidence dating back to as early as 450 B.C. to ancient Greece suggests that the lion's mane was utilized for its anti-inflammatory and wound-healing properties.²

Maybe one of the most compelling benefits associated with lion's mane is that it's considered to be a functional and adaptogenic food. Adaptogenic foods help the body to adapt to stress of any kind: physical, biological, or chemical.

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Lion's Mane Mushroom Benefits

With all of the names this mushroom has accumulated comes an even larger number of health benefits. Here are some of the top evidence-based health benefits of lion's mane mushrooms that give it such a high reputation in the health and wellness world.

01 | Can Improve Immune Health

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Speaking of [immune health](#), hedgehog mushrooms are effective at keeping our immune systems strong and functioning optimally. This is due, in part, to their bioactive plant compounds and [zinc](#), both of which are antioxidants that help reduce inflammation in the body and fight off disease-causing free radicals.³⁴ When it comes to lion's mane, its protein and carbohydrate content also amplifies its immune-boosting powers.

One animal study found that one type of protein extracted from lion's mane was associated with modulation of the immune system through regulation of the gut microbiome in mice.⁵

While another found that certain carbs in this mushroom also stimulated our intestinal bacteria, helping to enhance the body's cellular immune system pathways.⁶

While more human studies are needed to confirm, emerging research also suggests that these nutritional components add up when it comes to fighting off some of the scariest of illnesses, like cancer. One in vitro and animal study, for example, found lion's mane extract to be effective against liver, colon, and even gastric cancer cells.⁷ Further studies and reviews echo these findings when it comes to this fungus' potential to stand up to cancer.⁸⁹

6 Exceptional Superfoods to Eat for a Strong, Healthy Immune System

02 | **Helps Boost and Protect Brain Health**

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Where these mushrooms really shine, and what they're most known for, is their ability to positively impact our brain health. This is primarily due to the neurotrophic factors and bioactive compounds found in this functional fungus. Neurotrophic factors are biomolecules made of protein that promote the growth and differentiation of neurons, the nerve cells in the brain that send and receive information.¹⁰

Lion's mane has also been associated with reduced brain inflammation, offering neuroprotective benefits.¹¹ Some of these benefits include symptom improvement of sleep disorders, Alzheimer's, and Parkinson's disease.^{12 13 14} One animal study even found lion's mane to assist in neurotransmission and recognition memory.¹⁵

03 | **Supports Gut Health**

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As already mentioned above, this edible fungi is also a champion for gut health. Many of the functional mushrooms, including lion's mane, are excellent sources of beta-glucan, a kind of soluble fiber that benefits our health in a number of ways beyond just gut health, including immune, heart, and metabolic health.^{16 17 18}

It also has a prebiotic effect in the microbiome, serving as food for our healthy gut bacteria. Beyond its beta-glucan content, animal studies suggest lion's mane may potentially be

beneficial in treating inflammatory bowel disease and ulcerative colitis. ^{19 20}

04 | Promotes Heart Health

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Lion's mane mushrooms can even help support heart health. Similar to other soluble fibers, their beta-glucans also bind to cholesterol in the small intestine and move it through the rest of the digestive tract for disposal. This means that cholesterol literally goes down the drain instead of being absorbed into your blood. Beta-glucans are also associated with reduced blood pressure levels and together, cholesterol and blood pressure make up some of the key conditions needed for heart disease to arise. ²¹

Various studies reiterate these impacts, with one in vitro showing lion's mane's ability to help reduce bad cholesterol (or low-density lipoprotein, LDL) levels. ²² While another review found edible plants, including lion's mane (though it's technically a fungus), to help promote healthy blood clotting in humans, another contributor to heart disease if functioning improperly. ²³

05 | Provides Important Vitamins and Minerals

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Additionally, these fungi offer quite a few vitamins and minerals including potassium, iron, and B vitamins. These nutrients combine to support healthy fluid balance, immune function, red blood cell formation, and energy metabolism. ^{24 25 26}

06 | May Help Regulate Blood Sugars

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These fungi also impact metabolic health, including the ability to regulate blood sugars. While this makes sense given this mushroom's fiber content, there's budding research to back it up. In one animal study, lion's mane was found to help reduce blood sugars to

normal levels while also providing a protective effect on the pancreas, liver, and kidneys.²⁷ Another found this mushroom to help relieve diabetic nerve pain in animal subjects.

That said, more research on human subjects is required to say definitively its ability to help people with (and without) diabetes manage their blood sugar levels and aid diabetes-related nerve pain.

07 | **May Alleviate Anxiety and Depression**

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Early research indicates that several of the chemicals in lion's mane mushrooms boost the regeneration of brain cells and improve the performance of the hippocampus, the part of the brain that regulates emotional response.²⁸

Studies also show that individuals with depression and anxiety have lower nerve growth factor (NGF). NGF helps nerve cells regenerate and remain healthy, which are factors in mood regulation. Lion's mane mushrooms promote these factors, which indicates that it could be a potential alternative medication for depression in the future.²⁹

08 | **Can Help Nervous System Recovery**

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Individuals who have had an injury to the brain, spinal cord, or nervous system may benefit from lion's mane mushrooms. Lion's mane has the ability to aid in the regeneration of peripheral nerves.³⁰ Because of these properties, scientists are looking into using lion's mane to treat a number of illnesses and injuries, including traumatic brain injuries, stroke, multiple sclerosis, and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, among others.³¹

09 | **Guards Against Stomach Ulcers**

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As mentioned earlier, lion's mane can help with gut health and certain intestinal disorders. But it also fights against stomach ulcers through a couple of mechanisms of action. Ulcers

are usually caused by one of two things: first, by overuse of NSAIDs like ibuprofen, which eat away at the mucus lining of the stomach; second, through the presence of a bacteria called *H. pylori*.³² Lion's mane has been shown to thicken the mucosal lining of the stomach, fighting against ulcers caused by NSAIDs and slowing the growth of *H. pylori*.³³

10 | **Reduces Systemic Inflammation**

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According to the NIH, chronic inflammatory diseases are the leading cause of death worldwide. Chronic inflammation is associated with diabetes, cardiovascular disease, arthritis, allergies, COPD, autoimmune disorders, and more.³⁴ Studies have shown that lion's mane mushrooms contain anti-inflammatory compounds that can lessen the impact of these conditions.³⁵

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How to Take Lion's Mane

Acknowledging that several of the studies examined above were conducted in animals, there's enough human evidence for researchers to conclude that lion's mane is a bonafide superfood.³⁶ But how can you include it in your cooking and daily routine?

Lion's mane is one of the few functional mushrooms that you can find in its whole form relatively readily these days, especially in specialty food stores and from local producers. You can whip up any of your [favorite mushroom recipes](#), adding it to pasta, soups, eggs, and rice dishes. However, many feature lion's mane in vegan "seafood" recipes as it can offer a flavor and texture reminiscent of lobster, shrimp, or crab. These mushrooms can even be steeped in hot water to make a deliciously earthy tea loaded with health benefits.

Lion's mane can also be powdered and added to stews, soups, and gravies, not only as a way to boost the recipe's healthfulness but to add umami flavor. However, it can just as easily be added to smoothies, coffees, teas, and oatmeal in smaller amounts without compromising the overall flavor. There are also a variety of mushroom coffee and tea alternative brands that feature this fungus.

Supplement Safety and Tips

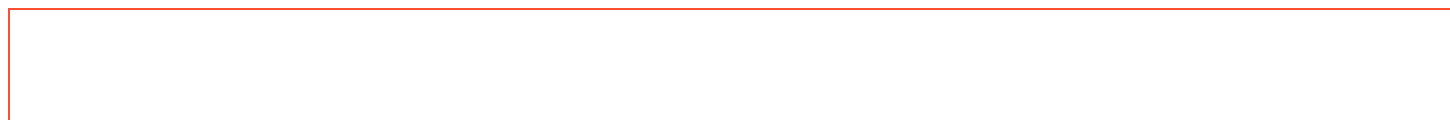
There are a number of supplements available that feature lion's mane, including pills, powders, and tinctures. When buying supplements, however, it's extremely important to know that while the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) monitors supplements in the country, it does not test or regulate each one for safety or purity.³⁷ This means that products that are *not* reliable or safe are as readily available on the market for purchase, ultimately placing that risk and responsibility on the consumer.

That means it's (unfortunately) our job as consumers to do our research before buying supplements to ensure their safety and purity. There are a few organizations conducting third-party verifications to help in that process including NSF and U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP). Look for their seal of approval on any products you're considering.

Side Effects and Risks of Taking Lion's Mane

Scientists are still researching the side effects and possible risks of taking lion's mane supplements. No human trials have been conducted to determine the risks and significant side effects. However, no adverse effects were observed in animal trials, even at higher doses.³⁸

If you are allergic or sensitive to mushrooms, however, you should avoid taking lion's mane. Allergic reactions can present in rashes and difficulty breathing; as a general rule, you should always speak with your doctor before adding any supplements to your diet.



Frequently Asked Questions

Can you take lion's mane mushrooms every day?

Yes, you can eat lion's mane mushrooms every day; just watch your daily intake. The recommended dosage varies by individual based on weight, metabolism, and tolerance. Supplements range widely in dosage from 250 to 2,500 mg per day, so it's crucial to consult your physician before starting a regimen.

How long do you have to take lion's mane before you begin to see benefits?

In short, it depends on who you ask. Some supplement companies state that you'll begin to see effects from eating lion's mane within two to five days. Others say it can take up to six months to see an impact. The effects will likely depend on your metabolism and the dose that you've chosen.

What's the best adaptogenic mushroom to take?

Adaptogenic mushroom use has become quite popular, and as a result, there are a good amount of options to choose from. The benefits vary from species to species, so pick one based on the effects you're hoping to see. In addition to lion's mane, reishi, [chaga](#), and cordyceps are also commonly used supplements. Some supplements mix different types of mushrooms in each formulation.

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