Exploring the Health Benefits of Spices and Herbs

Adding a dash of cinnamon, a pinch of red pepper, or a sprinkle of ginger to culinary creations may offer benefits in addition to flavor. With the increasing interest in functional foods, the latest research shows that spices and herbs offer a number of possible health benefits. The table below focuses on a few popular spices and herbs and explores the research on potential health benefits. Suggestions for spice and herb use are also included. There is a reason to season!

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| CINNAMON    | - Cinnamon is the dried inner bark of various evergreen trees belonging to the genus Cinnamomum.  
  - At harvest, the bark is stripped off and put in the sun, where it curls into the familiar form called “quills.” | - Inconclusive evidence to support blood glucose lowering in patients with diabetes  
  - Likely effective in pain relief when applied topically | - Sprinkle on fruits, oatmeal, and yogurt  
  - Used in baked goodies and desserts  
  - Add to chili to create a ’Cincinnati’ touch |
| RED PEPPER  | - Red Pepper is the dried, ripened fruit pod of Capsicum frutescens, one of the most pungent Capsicums.  
  - It is sometimes referred to as Cayenne Red Pepper. | - Possibly effective in treating back pain, cluster headache, fibromyalgia, seasonal allergies, and prurigo nodularis (a skin disease) | - Creates heat and bite to seasoning blends, meats, pickles, seafood, Italian, Indian, Mexican, and Caribbean cuisines |
| GINGER      | - Ginger is the dried knobby shaped root of the perennial herb Zingiberofficinale.  
  - Once the leaves of the plant die, the thick roots, about 6 inches long, are dug up and sold as ginger root. | - Possibly effective in treating painful menstruation, morning sickness, osteoarthritis, post-op nausea and vomiting, and vertigo  
  - Inconclusive evidence to support chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting, migraine headache, myalgia, and rheumatoid arthritis | - Used in Indian curries, and Chinese, Japanese, and European spice blends  
  - Used in popular baked goods including gingerbread and ginger snap cookies  
  - Ginger Ale, a sweetened beverage refreshment  
  - Often accompanies sushi to clean the palate |
| GARLIC      | - Allium sativum, commonly known as garlic, is a species in the onion genus.  
  - The plant is part of the lily family that produces a pungent, strong-smelling garlic bulb. | - Possibly effective in treating atherosclerosis, colorectal cancer, gastric cancer, hypertension, tick bites, and a variety of skin conditions if used topically (ringworm, jock itch, and athlete’s foot) | - Sauté with vegetables  
  - Used in Italian pastas & dishes  
  - Added to marinades, sauces and dressings  
  - Used for garlic butter to make garlic bread |
### Spice & Herbs Description Potential Health Benefits Uses

**ROSEMARY**
- Rosemary is the dried leaves of the evergreen Rosmarinus officinalis.
- Rosemary leaves are slightly curved, resembling miniature curved pine needles.
- Normally hand harvested, the Rosemary plant grows about 2 to 3 feet tall and is very hardy as it grows under harsh mountainous conditions.¹
- Possibly effective in treating alopecia areata (hair loss)?
- Used in seasoning blends for lamb and Mediterranean cuisines.
- Sprinkle over ice cream and mousses
- Use sprigs for roasting, grilling or on the barbeque
- Mix with orange to create a sweet glaze
- Cook with potatoes and other vegetables

**OREGANO**
- Oregano is the dried leaves of the herbs Origanum spp or Lippia spp (Mexican). Both varieties have traditionally been harvested in the "wild."
- "Oregano" means Marjoram in Spanish, and although sometimes referred to as "Wild Marjoram" it is a different herb.³
- Possibly effective in treating intestinal parasitic infection⁴
- Used in pizza and pasta sauces
- Mexican Oregano is found in chili powders and adds flavor to Mexican dishes.
- Sauté with vegetables and bean dishes
- Salad topper

**CURCUMIN**
- Curcumin (also referred to as turmeric) is derived from dried rhizomes of the herb Curcuma longa.
- Curcumin is a member of the ginger family and is a polyphenol.
- Possibly effective in treating indigestion and osteoarthritis⁵
- Inconclusive evidence to support Alzheimer’s disease, colorectal cancer, anterior uveitis (eye swelling), rheumatoid arthritis, and skin cancer⁶
- Little reliable evidence to support its use for any health condition because few clinical trials have been conducted¹⁰
- Often an important ingredient in curry mixes
- Add a pinch to jazz up egg salad
- Used in many Moroccan dishes
- Pairs well with chicken, duck, turkey, vegetables, rice, and salad dressings

### Resources

### Contact SCAN
**www.scandpg.org**
**800.249.2875**

Written by SCAN registered dietitians (RDs) to provide nutrition guidance. The key to optimal meal planning is individualization. Contact a SCAN RD for personalized nutrition plans. Access “Find a SCAN RD” at www.scandpg.org or by phone at 800.249.2875.