



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!

Spice & Herbs	Description	Potential Health Benefits	Uses
CINNAMON 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cinnamon is the dried inner bark of various evergreen trees belonging to the genus <i>Cinnamomum</i>. At harvest, the bark is stripped off and put in the sun, where it curls into the familiar form called “quills.”¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inconclusive evidence to support blood glucose lowering in patients with diabetes² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sprinkle on fruits, oatmeal, and yogurt Used in baked goodies and desserts Add to chili to create a ‘Cincinnati’ touch
RED PEPPER 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Red Pepper is the dried, ripened fruit pod of <i>Capsicum frutescens</i>, one of the most pungent <i>Capsicum</i>s. It is sometimes referred to as Cayenne Red Pepper.¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely effective in pain relief when applied topically³ Possibly effective in treating back pain, cluster headache, fibromyalgia, seasonal allergies, and prurigo nodularis (a skin disease)³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates heat and bite to seasoning blends, meats, pickles, seafood, Italian, Indian, Mexican, and Caribbean cuisines
GINGER 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ginger is the dried knobby shaped root of the perennial herb <i>Zingiberofficinale</i>. Once the leaves of the plant die, the thick roots, about 6 inches long, are dug up and sold as ginger root.¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possibly effective in treating painful menstruation, morning sickness, osteoarthritis, post-op nausea and vomiting, and vertigo⁴ Inconclusive evidence to support chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting, migraine headache, myalgia, and rheumatoid arthritis^{4, 5} 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Allium sativum</i>, 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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)⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sauté with vegetables Used in Italian pastas & dishes Added to marinades, sauces and dressings Used for garlic butter to make garlic bread

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ROSEMARY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rosemary is the dried leaves of the evergreen <i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>. 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possibly effective in treating alopecia areata (hair loss)⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oregano is the dried leaves of the herbs <i>Origanum</i> spp or <i>Lippia</i> 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.¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possibly effective in treating intestinal parasitic infection⁸ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curcumin (also referred to as turmeric) is derived from dried rhizomes of the herb <i>Curcuma longa</i>. Curcumin is a member of the ginger family and is a polyphenol. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possibly effective in treating indigestion and osteoarthritis⁹ Inconclusive evidence to support Alzheimer's disease, colorectal cancer, anterior uveitis (eye swelling), rheumatoid arthritis, and skin cancer⁹ Little reliable evidence to support its use for any health condition because few clinical trials have been conducted¹⁰ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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

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- Curcumin. National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. Available at: <http://www.nccam.nih.gov/health/turmeric/ata glance.htm#science>. Accessed October 8, 2012.

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