

Properties and Uses for Herbs and Spices

Allspice: Allspice is an aromatic stimulant that helps to relieve indigestion and gas.

Basil: contains antioxidant properties, decreases inflammation and inhibits lipid peroxidation

Chili: boost metabolism, promote sweating which naturally cool the body, and also contain antioxidant properties.

Cilantro: is a great digestive aid, is known to help the body eliminate metals, and also has antioxidant properties.

Cinnamon: "Cinnamon affects cholesterol, triglycerides, and glucose transport -- all reported in clinical trials," says Don Graves, Ph.D., a professor of biochemistry at the University of California in Santa Barbara. In a 2003 study, researchers supplemented the diets of 60 diabetic men and women with one, three, or six grams (just more than one teaspoon) of cinnamon daily. After 40 days, subjects' levels of ldl cholesterol fell by as much as 26 percent. "There was no difference in the effects at one gram or six," Graves says. Cinnamon has also been used as an antidote to diarrhea, flatulence and stomach upset and has been used as a metabolism booster. Preliminary government research indicates that a teaspoon of cinnamon daily may lower high blood pressure. A powerful anti-microbial agent, cinnamon can kill E.Coli and other bacteria that contribute to urinary tract infections, tooth decay and gum disease. Even the fragrance of cinnamon has been shown to increase alertness and decrease frustration while driving. One study found cinnamon improved scores on tasks such as memory, recognition, visual-motor speed and coordination and attention.

Cayenne Pepper: Can increase metabolism and fat-burning ability by up to 25%. Cayenne contains capsaicin, which blocks pain signals and may help deactivate nitrosamines and other carcinogens. But be moderate: Too much hot pepper may promote stomach cancer.

Chives: contain many of the same sulfur-based compounds credited for garlic's effects on arteries and cancer.

Clove: Well known for relieving tooth and gum pain, clove is also effective for eliminating intestinal parasites, bacteria and fungi. Clove has anti-inflammatory properties which make it effective in relief of muscle, arthritis and rheumatism pain.

Dill: has antioxidant as well as antimicrobial properties.

Fennel Seed: offers relief from gas, mild GI cramping and just feeling stuffed--thus the seeds offered at the end of Indian meals.

Garlic: Regular consumption of garlic has been shown to decrease blood pressure and cholesterol levels. It is a digestive aid and prevents flatulence. Recent research shows garlic to be helpful in the treatment of diabetes as well as being an anti-inflammatory herb which

boosts immunity and has anti-clotting effects. Garlic destroys cancer cells and may disrupt the metabolism of tumor cells, says Karen Collins, RD, nutrition advisor to the American Institute for Cancer Research. "Studies suggest that one or two cloves weekly provide cancer-protective benefits."

Ginger: In 2001, a headline-making study found highly concentrated forms of ginger helped reduce osteoarthritis-related knee pain. "Ginger improved pain to a degree almost the same as anti-inflammatory medications," says researcher Roy Altman, M.D., professor of medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles. There is a catch, though: "If you wanted to use ginger for this effect, you'd have to take a bushel and boil it down," Altman says. Ginger's most consistently proven benefit is its ability to relieve nausea, morning and motion sickness. Ginger also increases metabolic rate, boosts the immune system and protects against bacteria and fungi. Gingerol is a powerful anti-oxidant with cancer-fighting attributes that may even help prevent Alzheimer's.

Horseradish: Is known as a digestive stimulant

Lemongrass: has antioxidant, anti-cancer and anti-inflammatory properties.

Marjoram: possesses antioxidant as well as antimicrobial properties.

Mustard: Is a stimulant that can be used to relieve respiratory complaints, as in a mustard plaster placed on a person's chest.

Nutmeg: eases nausea and vomiting, indigestion and diarrhea. As nutmeg produces drowsiness, it can be used for insomnia and anxiety, with a side benefit of lowering blood pressure and calming muscle spasms. This spice can also increase concentration and circulation. Do not take too much nutmeg at one time as too much (one to three whole nuts) causes swelling, shock, nausea and even hallucinations.

Oregano: The strongest health benefit for oregano is that it's been linked to food preservation. In 2003, researchers found that applying a concentrated oregano extract to prepared meats may destroy *Listeria* bacteria. "The same chemical constituents that give herbs and spices their pungency are also powerful bacterial inhibitors," says Catherine Donnelly, Ph.D., professor of nutrition and food science at the University of Vermont. "Oregano is one of the best bacteria killers." Its phenols -- a type of antioxidant -- destroy the cell membranes of bacteria. Herbs with the highest antioxidant activity belonged to the oregano family. In general, oregano had 3 to 20 times higher antioxidant activity than the other herbs studied. Oregano has 42 times more antioxidant activity than apples, 30 times more than potatoes, 12 times more than oranges and 4 times more than blueberries. A USDA study found that, gram for gram, oregano has the highest antioxidant activity of 27 fresh culinary herbs.

Paprika: Contains capsaicin, whose anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects may lower the risk of cancer (also found in cayenne and red chili peppers). There's no specific recommended dose, but moderation is probably the best way to go.

Parsley: Possessing antimicrobial as well as antioxidant properties, parsley is known to naturally freshen breath.

Black Pepper: Black pepper (*Piper nigrum*) stimulates the taste buds in such a way that an alert is sent to the stomach to increase hydrochloric acid secretion, thereby improving digestion. Black pepper has long been recognized as a carminative, (a substance that helps prevent the formation of intestinal gas), a property likely due to its beneficial effect of stimulating hydrochloric acid production. In addition, black pepper has diaphoretic (promotes sweating), and diuretic (promotes urination) properties. Black pepper has demonstrated impressive antioxidant and antibacterial effects.

Peppermint: Is used to treat gastric and digestive disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome, as well as tension and insomnia. Inhibiting growth of fungus and bacteria, this herb may also help protect against cancer. Many find relief for allergies and asthma.

Rosemary: is an anti-inflammatory, anti-carcinogenic and antioxidant rich herb which also inhibits bone resorption. Rosemary also stops gene mutations that could lead to cancer and may help prevent damage to the blood vessels that raise heart attack risk.

Thyme: possesses antioxidant properties and inhibits bone resorption

Turmeric: Because rates of Alzheimer's disease are lower in India, where the population eats a diet containing more turmeric than Western diets, scientists have suggested the spice may be linked to preserving mental function. "The compounds in turmeric have demonstrated antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and cholesterol-lowering properties -- all thought to be involved in the onset of Alzheimer's disease," says Sally Frautschy, Ph.D., associate professor of medicine and neurology at UCLA. Turmeric's antioxidant abilities neutralize free radicals and therefore protects against cancer.