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SPICE IS NICE

Herbs and spices are honoured in cultures around the world for their healing properties and their flavour. Adding spices to your dishes not only enhances taste, but increases the variation in your digestive track's microbiome which can give your health a boost!

It is important to note that the research done on the health credentials of spices is limited, and often involves controlled amounts and larger doses than what you would normally consume in a day. This may be why we find the 'healing components' of many types of these spices condensed into supplements found on the drug store shelf.

Of course, as with anything we ingest, check with your health team to confirm whether increasing your intake of any of the following spices is safe, and will not contradict with any medication you may be taking.

Here is a quick summary of the top 10 spices that repeatedly show up when Googling *spices with health benefits*:

Cinnamon	- Contains a compound called cinnamaldehyde - Potent antioxidant activity that fights inflammation - Lowers cholesterol and triglycerides in the blood - Particularly strong in lowering blood sugars
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	- Effective dose is typically 0.5-2 teaspoons of cinnamon per day, or 1-6 grams
Sage	- Historic healing spice - Antioxidant - Anti-inflammatory properties - Lowers bad cholesterol - Cognitive-enhancing effects, and may help improve mood, alertness, attention, memory, and word recall in healthy adults and older adults with Alzheimer's disease - May ease menopause symptoms - Animal tests indicate potential cancer fighting properties
Turmeric	- Curcumin is the compound in turmeric that provides health benefits - o Curcumin is a powerful antioxidant that fights oxidative damage; oxidative damage is believed to be one of the key mechanisms behind aging and many diseases - o Curcumin is also strongly anti-inflammatory, to the point where it matches the effectiveness of some anti-inflammatory drugs - Improves brain function, reduces the risk of heart disease and cancer, and relieves arthritis - May reduce inflammation in the brain, which has been linked to Alzheimer's disease and depression
Peppermint	- Oily component of peppermint contains agents to boost health - Improves pain management in irritable bowel syndrome, or IBS, by relaxing the smooth muscles in the colon

	- Aids digestion, soothes stomach ache, bloating, gas, and diarrhea - Boosts mood and improves focus - Some studies show that peppermint in aromatherapy can help fight nausea - Applied to the forehead and temples, peppermint helps reduce headache symptoms - The main active agent, menthol, is an effective decongestant that helps loosen phlegm, breaks up coughs, and soothes and calms sore throats and dry coughs
Ginger	- Relieves nausea - Contains antioxidants, has strong anti-inflammatory properties, and can help with pain management - Encourages efficient digestion, so food doesn't linger as long in the gut - Reduces bloating and gas
Garlic	- Health effects are due to a compound called allicin - Boosts immunity and combats sickness including the common cold - Lowers colon cancer risk - Anti-inflammatory properties - Reduces total and/or LDL cholesterol - Reduces high blood pressure
Cayenne Pepper	- Healing ingredient is capsaicin - o Capsaicin has been shown to reduce appetite and increase fat burning - o Capsaicin reduces the number of pain signals sent to your brain so you don't register as much discomfort - Works on pain caused by arthritis and diabetes-related nerve damage

	- Protects against inflammation, keeps blood vessels healthy, and may lower blood pressure - Aids digestion and boosts the good bacteria in your gut - Clears congestion and may relieve headaches
Oregano	- Rich in antioxidants, specifically, carvacrol and thymol - o Carvacrol is the most abundant compound in oregano and has been shown to help stop the growth of several different types of bacteria - Anti-inflammatory properties - Fights infections
Rosemary	- Rosmarinic acid and other compounds found in rosemary have been shown to have antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antiviral, antibacterial, pain-relieving, and anticancer effects - Shown to suppress allergic responses and nasal congestion - May also be helpful in treating depression
Parsley	- High in antioxidants such as Vitamin C, carotenoids, and the flavonoids luteolin and apigenin, all of which have powerful cellular protective and anti-inflammatory effects in the body - Consuming a diet high in flavonoids may help protect against cognitive decline and heart disease

Along with the added flavour spices bring to your cooking, you can now enjoy knowing that these small, but mighty ingredients are also benefitting your health.

Or you can take this information with a grain of salt 😏

Sources:

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Morandini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rochelle Morandini

Member Health & Well-Being, Director

If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.