

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

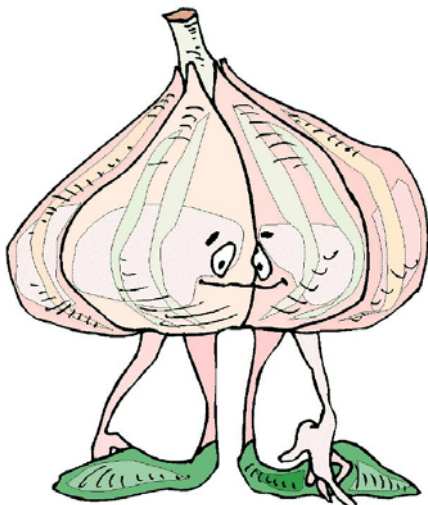
Get Spicy!

If you're using your spice rack as a decorative wall hanging and don't know your cumin from your coriander, it's time to spice up your life! Dr. Gravesen wants you to know that, in addition to enhancing the flavor of food, many herbs and spices have well-researched health benefits.

There's no doubt about it: food — herbs and spices in particular — is powerful medicine. This is good news for Dr. Gravesen, who continually urges patients to avoid unnecessary prescription and over-the-counter drugs — many of which have potentially serious side effects.

The end of the year is the perfect opportunity to refresh spice racks — and toss out those seasonings that have passed their prime due to age and exposure to heat or sunlight. Dr. Gravesen also suggests that patients use this time to learn about the specific health benefits of each herb, seed and spice.

Toward that end, Dr. Gravesen has prepared this *Optimal Health University*® handout featuring some of the most common spices and herbs. So start experimenting with some new flavors and give your taste buds, and your health, a boost.



Sprinkle Some Cinnamon

Consider sprinkling cinnamon on your oatmeal if you suffer from Type 2 diabetes.

This tasty spice has a long track record of reducing glucose (sugar) levels among Type 2 diabetics (*Biol Trace Elem Res* 1990;24:183-8).

Left unchecked, chronically high levels of glucose can weaken the body's ability to fight infection, lead to impaired vision, hinder circulation and wreak life-threatening havoc throughout the body.

Gobble up the Garlic

A little bad breath is a small price to pay for the powerful health benefits of this pungent spice.

Research reveals that garlic lowers blood pressure and blood fats (*Dis Mon* 2002;48:671-96). It's also a natural antiviral, antifungal and antibacterial agent.

But that's just for openers. Researchers note that the "stinking rose" may reduce the risk of several cancers. Laboratory studies show that its extracts and components effectively block experimentally induced tumors (*Eur J Pharmacol* 2004;485:97-103).

Garlic's secret ingredient is *allicin*, which gives the seasoning its characteristic taste and odor. The researchers in the above-cited journal found that



it's the allicin that actually inhibits the growth of cancer cells.

Jazz It Up With Ginger

Well known for soothing nausea, ginger is particularly helpful for moms-to-be because it's an all-natural alternative to drugs. Side effects associated with drugs are never good, but they are especially dangerous for pregnant women.

Open the Oregano

Bountiful in antioxidants, oregano has long been used in food preservation and in traditional medicine for the treatment of common ailments. It turns out that oregano can help with "oxidation-linked diseases, such as diabetes." (*Asia Pac J Clin Nutr* 2004;13:401-8.)

Rosmarinic acid, a principle component of oregano, may slow the starch-to-glucose rate, "which could contribute to the management of hyperglycemia and diabetes complications in the long term."

Reach for the Rosemary

This unique herb, which contains the phytonutrient *carnosol*, also packs a triple "anti" whammy. It's an anti-inflammatory, an anticarcinogen and an antioxidant.

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Rosemary may also eradicate facial wrinkles, according to researchers in Italy who tested an alcohol extract of rosemary leaves. They determined that this extract was “endowed with strong antioxidant activity ...capable of inhibiting oxidative alterations to skin surface lipids [fats].” (*Int J Tissue React* 2000;22:5-13.)

Consider Cayenne Pepper

This hot spice packs a zinger — and not only for your taste buds. Cayenne and other hot peppers have been shown to improve mood. In addition, the spice may reduce pain and inflammation when applied topically.

Turn to Turmeric

Turmeric, used extensively in Indian and Asian cuisine, receives its yellow color from a potent health-boosting component known as curcumin (*Nutr Today* 2003;38:24).

Studies show that curcumin may prevent a vast array of cancers, including prostate cancer, breast cancer and skin cancer.

Curcumin also lowers total cholesterol while boosting HDL (“good”) cholesterol (*Indian J Physiol Pharmacol* 1992;64:273-5).

Turmeric is also an all-natural anti-inflammatory (*Prostaglandins Leukot Essent Fatty Acids* 1989;37:57-64). It appears to stop cellular inflammation triggered by the activation of a gene called cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2), without the dangerous side effects associated with COX-2 inhibiting drugs (such as Vioxx® and Celebrex®). Other studies show that curcumin halts the cellular instigators of arthritis.

And that’s not all. Studies highlight curcumin as a powerful antidepressant, and it’s also been shown to ward off Alzheimer’s disease, inflammatory bowel disease, liver disease and multiple sclerosis.

Serve Some Saffron

Researchers in Mexico have demonstrated that saffron extract and its main ingredients — carotenoids — possess “chemopreventive properties against cancer.” (*Exp Biol Med* 2002;227:20-5.)

Add a Little Anise

These licorice-flavored seeds aren’t just for flavoring anise cookies during the holidays — they’re a natural diuretic, and laxative, which may assist glucose absorption.

Cook With Cumin

Popular for the zest it provides to a variety of foods, cumin seeds may also help prevent stomach and cervical cancer. In animal studies conducted in India, cumin therapy resulted in a “significant inhibition” of the number of tumors per mouse. Cumin was similarly aggressive when it came to reducing the number of cervical cancer cells. Researchers think cumin is able to corral cancerous cells because it changes their metabolism (*Nutr Cancer* 2003;47:171-80).

Create It With Coriander

This simple, humble spice “has been documented as a traditional treatment of diabetes” according to researchers in England. The coriander demonstrated “insulin-releasing and insulin-like activity” in animal testing (*Br J Nutr* 1999;81:203-9).

Fetch the Fennel

Instead of risking the potentially dangerous side effects of drugs, women can add a little fennel to their diets to help alleviate the cramping associated with monthly menstrual cycles.

In one study of 60 women, all-natural fennel’s effectiveness was comparable to medication. Researchers concluded that “the essence of fennel can be used as a safe and effective herbal drug for primary dysmenorrhea [painful or difficult menstruation].” (*Int J Gynaecol Obstet* 2003;80:153-7.)

Keep Spices Fresh and Zesty!

Whenever possible, opt for fresh herbs as opposed to dried. Fresh herbs retain more flavor and nutrients.

To get the maximum benefit from your dried spices, it’s important to keep them fresh. That means tossing out any that haven’t been used in the last year.

Also, if your spice rack is above the stove, consider moving it to another wall, and keep it out of direct sunlight as well.

Overcooking food can also dilute a spice’s health benefits.

Make an Appointment Today

Your doctor of chiropractic can provide you with a wealth of nutritional tips and information on other spices and herbs that are as healing as they are tasty.

Make an appointment today to learn how you can incorporate these all-natural wonders into your diet. And remember: Never add supplements or therapeutic amounts of herbs and spices to your diet without discussing it with your doctor first.

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