

Spice Up Your Health

How often do you use herbs or spices in your cooking or to season your food? Maybe you are looking for new cooking ideas in the kitchen, perhaps your doctor recommended you cut back on salt in your diet, or you have always wanted to add variety to your diet but aren't sure where to start. No matter the circumstances, herbs and spices can add great variety to your foods as well as potentially providing health benefits.

Cinnamon: Did you know that there are several types of cinnamon? Cassia cinnamon is most commonly used in the U.S., since it has a very strong flavor. It can originate from Indonesia, Thailand, or Saigon, and all have different flavor profiles. There is also ceylon cinnamon, coming from Sri Lanka. Ceylon is milder and harder to find in grocery stores.

If you have Type 2 Diabetes, studies have shown that cinnamon may help lower blood sugar. For others, there may be positive impacts on heart health, including lowering triglyceride levels as well as total cholesterol. Cinnamon is a powerful flavor in baking, but can also be used in a variety of other ways. Add a sprinkle to your breakfast in the morning, whether you are having cereal, oatmeal, or fruit. On the savory side, cinnamon is often used to flavor Indian food.

Ginger: There are many ways to find ginger in the store aisles. It comes fresh in the produce section as ginger root, powdered in the spice aisle, and in many products like herbal teas.

If you suffer from gastrointestinal distress like diarrhea or upset stomach, ginger may help relieve those symptoms. Ginger has been used for thousands of years across Asia to treat stomach ailments, and studies show these benefits are tangible. A little bit of ginger goes a long way in flavoring a dish. Much like cinnamon, it can be used in baking, but it can also be used in savory dishes like stir fries or other sauces.

Turmeric: If you've watched the news recently, you may have heard about some of the benefits of turmeric. While it may sound like the new kid on the block, turmeric has been around for thousands of years. As a spice, turmeric is bright yellow. It can add a pop of color to many dishes.

There are numerous claims to improvements to health from turmeric, and there are studies that support several of those claims. Turmer contains curcumin, which is a powerful antioxidant that can help reduce inflammation. This can help people with both arthritis and potentially Alzheimer's, as it has been shown to reduce brain inflammation as well. Turmeric can be used to season roasted vegetables and meat. It can also be added to rice or soup to spice up the flavor.

It's always best to try these spices as a part of food rather than buying them as capsules. As a general rule of thumb, our bodies absorb nutrients better when they are a part of food. There are dozens of other spices that also provide health benefits; these are just a few. Of course, please consult with your doctor if you are considering making major changes to your diet.

Sources:

5 Spices with Healthy Benefits. (2021). Johns Hopkins Medicine.

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/5-spices-with-healthy-benefits>

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