

Healthy Herbs & Spices



A dash of rosemary. A hint of mint. A sprig of basil. Common herbs and spices used to make foods taste good might also be good for you.

Although most people use herbs and spices, many are unaware that these plant foods are also powerful sources of antioxidants that may have disease-fighting capabilities, according to the results of a recent national survey conducted by an independent polling organization and sponsored by Gourmet Garden.

“While we've known for a long time that fruits and vegetables and other plant foods are high in antioxidants, herbs and spices have been overlooked as a potentially powerful source of antioxidants, vitamins and minerals,” said Dr. David Heber, Director, UCLA Center for Human Nutrition.

New research that studied the antioxidant concentration in more than 1,000 foods and beverages commonly consumed in the US shows that herbs and spices are actually higher in antioxidant capacity compared to many fruits and vegetables on an ounce-per-ounce basis. The study, by a collaboration of Norwegian and US scientists, reported that cloves have the highest antioxidant content followed by oregano, ginger, cinnamon and turmeric.

“Emerging research suggests that herbs and spices may aid in the prevention of cardiovascular disease and cancer, and the high levels of antioxidants and phytonutrients found in herbs and spices may boost the antioxidant properties of other healthy foods as well,” said Dr. Heber. In fact, one study found that adding herbs and spices increased the antioxidant capacity of the meal by 200%.

CINNAMON: helps soothe mild gastrointestinal conditions such as bloating

GARLIC: may reduce the risk of heart disease by decreasing blood cholesterol, preventing clogged arteries, and lowering blood pressure; it also may reduce cancer risk.

GINGER: quells nausea and vomiting caused by motion sickness or digestive problems.

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

Sources
Consumer Health News, Jan. 2007
Natural Health, Oct. 2003