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## Herbs can add health, spice to your life

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In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue. He was seeking a more direct passage to the Orient's rich spices. Spices and herbs were once rare and precious products used for medicine, flavoring perfume and incense.

Control of spices and herbs were at one time the cause of war. They are also what sparked the age of exploration, and the development of Western Civilization.

Today, we don't have to board a ship to enjoy the flavor or medicinal properties of the many herbs and spices available to us. We can explore spices and herbs on our own by planting our own herb garden, or taking a trip to our local store or farmers market.

Without too much effort, we can turn our kitchen a place of nourishment, joy and healing.

"Use spices that are as fresh as possible," says Gary Jacobson, Personal Chef, herbalist and owner of A Healthy Alternative. "Their health benefits and flavors will be more potent. Some of the best spices for greater health benefits are ginger, turmeric, garlic, cinnamon, cardamom, cumin and fennel. All of these spices boost well-being and make your food taste amazing."

Good resources for spices and herbs are the bulk section at Sunrise Natural Foods or Whole Foods, Newcastle Produce, local herbalists and Ayurvedic practitioners.

An ancient Ayurvedic proverb states, "When diet is wrong, medicine is of no use. When diet is correct, medicine is of no need."

The following overview of many common spices and herbs is intended to give you a flavor of the healing properties that herbs contain, in addition to making your food taste yummy. If you have a more serious health condition, please first consult with a health-care provider who is trained in the therapeutic use of herbs for healing:

### Basil

Relieves coughs, colds, headaches and fevers and helps to improve immunity. Add to fresh tomatoes, salads or on your sandwich along with your greens.

### Black Pepper

Improves digestion, helps eliminate toxins and release mucous from the body. Black pepper can go on just about anything you want.

### Cayenne

A strong stimulant, it stimulates digestion and circulation. Caution should be used when any inflammatory

condition exists, such as ulcers or gastritis. Cayenne is best when used with other spices, you can add a dash to your sauces or dressings.

#### Cilantro

Cools the gastro-intestinal tract, improves digestion, promotes urination. Cilantro is a staple in Mexican cooking, try using in salads, or rice dishes.

#### Cumin

Cumin improves digestion, relieves congestion and helps eliminate toxins. It can be used in rice dishes, on pasta or in soups.

#### Cardamom

One of the best and safest digestive stimulants, it aids digestion and relieves gas. It calms nerves and relieves gas. It is excellent for children with nervous tummy and helps to stop vomiting, belching or acid regurgitation. Use with caution if you have an ulcer. Relax with a warm cup of milk and honey, with a dash of cardamom. Use Cardamom whenever you use cinnamon.

#### Coriander

Improves digestion and increases appetite. Coriander relieves gas, promotes urination and helps relieve diarrhea, especially in children. It is an antidote for hot, pungent food - and useful as a household remedy for conditions that are caused by excess heat and inflammation.

#### Fennel

One of the most effective herbs to improve and strengthen digestion, and is excellent for children or the elderly. Helps promote the flow of breast milk. It relieves cramping in the abdomen, colic and gas. Fennel can be roasted, and eaten after meals, or it can be blended with cumin and coriander as a delicious spice blend.

#### Cinnamon

Cinnamon is a circulatory tonic, it is effective at strengthening and harmonizing the flow of circulation. It helps to relieve colds and coughs, and because of its mild astringency it can be used when suffering from diarrhea.

It is very tasty in warm milk, on oatmeal, in rice or in any beverage. Blend cinnamon with cardamom, ginger and a dash of black pepper and honey for your own home-made chai.

#### Garlic

It is one of the most effective anti-microbial plants available and is a powerful rejuvenate herb. It strengthens heart and immunity, and improves digestion by promoting the development of natural bacterial flora while killing pathogenic organisms. You should be careful with use of garlic when conditions of hyperacidity exist. What doesn't taste good with garlic?

#### Ginger

Known as the "universal medicine," ginger can be used to alleviate digestive and respiratory conditions. It improves digestion, alleviates nausea and vomiting, stomach spasms, cough and asthma. Dry ginger can be added to hot water with honey for a tea. It is good when blended with cinnamon, cardamom and a dash of black pepper for a homemade chai tea. Try fresh or dry ginger cooked with veggies and rice, or add to salad dressings and sauces.

#### Nutmeg

Promotes sleep, relieves cough and colds and calms the mind. Increases absorption of nutrients, and works well when used with cardamom and ginger. Nutmeg can be mixed with buttermilk to stop diarrhea. It should not be used if pregnant. Soothing with warm milk or add into any recipe that calls for cinnamon

#### Rosemary

Beneficial for headaches, improves memory and eases menstruation. Of course, rosemary is wonderful in spaghetti sauce or on pizza. Try it on grilled veggies, in your omelet or potatoes.

#### Saffron

Purifies blood, improves digestion, calms nerves and is excellent for the metabolism and female reproductive system. Though, should not be used when pregnant.

#### Tumeric

An amazing natural anti-biotic, Tumeric improves digestion, cleanses blood, strengthens immunity, decreases inflammation and is excellent for the skin. It promotes proper metabolism in the body, and aids in the digestion of protein.

#### Thyme

Relieves gas, improves digestion, soothes cough. Use it wherever you would use rosemary, and in all your soups.

- Jean Munoz is a Clinical Ayurvedic Practitioner & Herbalist, where she uses food and herbs in natural healing programs. Jean is a registered yoga instructor, certified pilates instructor, and owner of Sattva Yoga & Pilates. She serves on the board of the California Association of Ayurvedic Medicine, and is a member of the National Ayurvedic Medicine Association. You can contact Jean at [jean@jeanmunoz.com](mailto:jean@jeanmunoz.com).

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