

## WELL-BEING

## Spice Of Life

Comforting And Delicious,  
Holiday Flavors Also Offer  
Health Benefits

By KELLY VAUGHAN

When the weather is cool, it's great to boost a cup of morning coffee or homemade applesauce with a little bit of spice. The rich, warm aromas of cinnamon, ginger and other culinary spices are comforting in and of themselves, but certain spices also are believed to contribute to overall physical well-being.

"Interest in herbs and spices found in functional foods and supplements, seen as an adjunct to disease management, is worthy of discussion," says Ellen Metzger, a registered dietitian at Nutrition and Wellness Consulting in Glastonbury. However, she and others recommend that patients consult their health care practitioners on appropriate use.

"Every spice potentially has benefits, but these are particularly potent," agrees Dr. Jonathan Goodman, a naturopathic physician in Bristol. "As long as they're appropriate for the person and used in the right way, they're safe."

Here are four that have uses beyond spicing up pumpkin pie:

**Cinnamon**

While cinnamon is an ingredient in some of the most popular (and calorically decadent) holiday desserts, it also may help manage Type 2 diabetes. Consuming cinnamon can lower blood sugar levels and eventually stabilize sugar in the bloodstream — an appealing benefit for the approximately 86 million



adults who suffer from prediabetes, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Cinnamon is a great culinary herb and the great thing about it is it is truly safe. It's wonderful for helping with blood sugar and it can help stabilize insulin levels," says Dr. Lauren Young, clinic director and naturopathic physician at Collaborative Natural Health Partners in Manchester.

She adds that "for people who have a sweet tooth, [cinnamon] can add a lot of flavor without adding a lot of sugar. A great recipe would be to slice up an apple and shake it in a bag with some cinnamon, and then you've got a really simple way to add some cinnamon into your diet."

Jack Phelan, owner of The Spice Mill in Manchester, advises that consumers choose fresh cinnamon sticks to ensure quality. "The longer a spice sits in its ground form, the more the high volatile content will degrade."

**Ginger**

Goodman says ginger has "a really warming constitution, which is nice for people who are typically cold. It is wonderful for nausea and is part of a family of herbs called carminative, so it helps with overall digestion. It has anti-inflammatory properties as well."

Young adds, "You want the pure stuff though, no artificial ginger."

Ginger tea, crystallized ginger or small shavings of fresh ginger root in hot water can alleviate motion sickness, nausea or other gastrointestinal distress. Goodman recommends that pregnant women



who experience severe morning sickness drink ginger tea. “Chop about an inch to 2 inches of ginger root, boil it for half an hour, and drink that three to four times a day.”

**Nutmeg**

Toenail fungus and other bothersome bacteria may not be the prettiest ailments to treat, but nutmeg oil can help.

“It has really great anti-fungal properties and has also been shown to help with yeast. It has anti-microbial properties that are very gentle,” says Young.

But proceed with caution, Metzger says. “Toxic overdose occurred at a 5 grams dose. The excessive use of nutmeg is not recommended in people with psychiatric conditions.”

**Cloves**

Next time you have a toothache or gum pain, try



something a little less caloric than a bowl of ice cream. Cloves contain high levels of eugenol, an essential oil with anti-inflammatory benefits and a natural antibacterial remedy.

Young notes that cloves “have analgesic properties that can help with pain and inflammation.”

However, she advises against an old-time remedy of rubbing clove oil on a Q-Tip and holding it on a toothache, which can irritate an already affected area.

These spices have been used medicinally for thousands of years, Young says. “It’s exciting to see people reclaiming their kitchens and using herbs that can have all of these benefits.”



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