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9 Herbs and Spices With Proven Health Benefits

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Even when our food choices aren't the best, herbs and spices do more than just improve taste. They give any meal a nutrition boost. And according to a new study they may even reverse the damage from an unhealthy meal.

Researchers from Penn State University cooked up coconut chicken, cheese bread and a dessert biscuit for six men. The subjects were aged 30 to 65 and overweight but otherwise healthy. On one day the meal was served plain. On another day researchers added two tablespoons of a blend of nine herbs and spices to the meal.

After each meal the researchers drew blood from the subjects every 30 minutes for four hours. They found that antioxidant activity in the blood increased 13% after the spicy meal compared to the plain meal.

The spices and herbs also decreased post-meal insulin levels by 21% and triglyceride levels in the blood by as much as 31%. That in turn could reduce heart disease risk.

The spices used in the Penn State study included [garlic](#) ^[3] powder, [rosemary](#) ^[4], [oregano](#) ^[5], [cinnamon](#) ^[6], [cloves](#) ^[7], [paprika](#) ^[8], [turmeric](#) ^[9], [ginger](#) ^[10] and [black pepper](#) ^[11]. Besides heart benefits, each of these spices has its own proven health benefits.

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1. Cinnamon Balances Blood Sugar

Cinnamon normalizes blood sugar levels in [type 2 diabetics](#) ^[12] by [improving the ability to respond to insulin](#) ^[13]. It works by slowing the rate at which the stomach empties after eating. In one study people ate about a cup of rice pudding with and without a teaspoon of cinnamon. Adding the cinnamon slowed the rate the stomach emptied from 37% to 34.5% and significantly slowed the rise in blood sugar levels.

And a [2003 USDA study](#) ^[14] found that after 40 days of eating between just 1 and 6 grams of cinnamon (about 2 teaspoons), type 2 diabetics reduced their blood sugar levels by 18-29%.

2. Garlic Slows Atherosclerosis

The Penn State researchers noted that studies associate garlic use with a 38% decrease in the risk of heart problems.^[i] Other studies show aged garlic helps slow the progression of [atherosclerosis](#) ^[15].^[ii]

Most studies showing the heart benefits of garlic use doses of 600 to 5600 mg of garlic powder, 9 to 18 mg garlic oil, 1000 to 7200 mg aged garlic extract, or 4 to 10 grams of raw garlic.

3. Rosemary Protects Eyesight

A relative of mint, rosemary has traditionally been used to stimulate the immune system, improve digestion, increase circulation, boost memory and act as an anti-inflammatory.

Animal studies show it [acts as an antidepressant](#) ^[16], improves type 1 diabetes and even [prevents weight gain from a high fat diet](#) ^[17].

A recent study showed that [rosemary also protects against age-related macular degeneration](#) ^[18].

4. Oregano Reduces Viral Activity

You may know oregano as the essential herb for Italian cooking especially for tomato sauces and [pizza](#) [19]. But it's also a powerful medicinal herb. Studies show oregano supports the immune system, and has antifungal, antibacterial and [anti-cancer](#) [20] properties. It also increases [liver regeneration](#) [21].

The oil from oregano contains an antiviral compound called [carvacrol](#) [22]. It can significantly reduce viral activity within 15 minutes of exposure. [iii] Look for oregano essential oil standardized to 60-75% carvacrol.

5. Cloves Fight Pain

Cloves are rich in [eugenol](#) [23] which has been proven to fight environmental toxins and inflammation. Studies show it may also trigger programmed cell [death of colon cancer cells](#) [24]. And the oil is an effective [mosquito repellent](#) [25].

Cloves are also a mild pain killer. They've been proven to be [as effective as benzocaine](#) [26] as a topical anesthetic. That's why it's added to over-the-counter sore throat sprays and mouth washes. It's also a good addition to your [homemade toothpaste](#) [27].

6. Paprika Battles Multi-Drug Resistance

Paprika is more than a decoration for deviled eggs. It's made by grinding red chili peppers and is full of vitamin C and carotenoids. The carotenoids from paprika have been shown to [combat ulcer-causing H. pylori and help reverse multi-drug resistance](#) [28].

Use paprika as a rub for meats and fish, or add a teaspoon to hummus for extra spice.

7. Turmeric Improves Memory

There are now [over 600 documented health benefits to eating turmeric](#) [29].

Researchers in Taiwan just added one more. They found that just one gram of turmeric at breakfast helps improve the memory of people in the early stages of diabetes. [iv] The turmeric improved working memory over the following six hours. Other studies have found that turmeric also reduces the risk of dementia.

8. Ginger Soothes Muscle Pain

The Chinese have used ginger for thousands of years to treat stomach upset, diarrhea, and nausea. Today it is known to relieve nausea due to seasickness, motion sickness, [morning sickness](#) [30] and chemotherapy nausea. One [study showed ginger root to be more effective for nausea and vomiting during pregnancy than Dramamine](#) [31], a commonly used over-the-counter and prescription drug for motion sickness.

Ginger also contains anti-oxidant compounds known as [gingerols](#) [32] which have powerful anti-inflammatory properties. In addition to reducing [muscle pain from exercise](#) [33], they have been shown to reduce pain and swelling, and improve mobility in those suffering from osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. Gingerol have also been found to:

- reduce the number and size of [colon cancer tumors](#) [34]
- [inhibit the metastasis of breast cancer cells](#) [35]
- [combat chemotherapy resistant pancreatic cancer cells](#) [36]
- [reduce knee pain from osteoarthritis](#) [37]

9. Black Pepper Reduces Cigarette Cravings

Black pepper improves digestion by signaling the stomach to produce hydrochloric acid. It also helps prevent intestinal gas and acts as a diuretic. And inhaling the vapors from black pepper has been shown to help people [stop smoking](#) [38].

You may see black pepper added to some of your supplements. That's because one of its active ingredients [piperine enhances the bioavailability of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients](#) [39].

For more information visit [GreenMedInfo's page on the health benefits of culinary herbs and spices](#) [40].

[i] Ried K, Toben C, Fakler P. "[Effect of garlic on serum lipids: an updated meta-analysis](#) [41]." *Nutr Rev.* 2013;71(5):282Y299

[ii] Matthew J Budoff et al. "[Aged garlic extract supplemented with B vitamins, folic acid and L-arginine retards the progression of subclinical atherosclerosis: a randomized clinical trial.](#) [42] *Breast Cancer Res Treat.* 2004 Feb;83(3):221-31. PMID: [19573556](#) [42]

[iii] Gilling, D.H., Kitajima, M., Torrey, J.R., Bright, K.R. "[Antiviral efficacy and mechanisms of action of oregano essential oil and its primary component carvacrol against murine norovirus](#) [43]. *J Appl Microbiol* 2014 May; 116(5): 1149-63. PMID 24779581

[iv] Meei-Shyuan Lee et al. "[Turmeric improves post-prandial working memory in pre-diabetes independent of insulin](#) [44]." *Asia Pac J Clin Nutr.*, 2014;23 DOI: [10.6133/apjcn.2014.23.4.24](#) [44]



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- [31] <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17957907>
- [32] <http://www.greenmedinfo.com/article/6-gingerol-compound-found-within-ginger-inhibits-inflammation>
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- [45] http://www.amazon.com/Nourishing-Menopause-Whole-Food-Balancing-Naturally/dp/0615842569/ref=as_sl_pc_ss_til?tag=markinheacoa-20&linkCode=w01&linkId=IF53WKSMTJEF5AI&creativeASIN=0615842569
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