

While you might use herbs and spices to add flavour to your food, you may not be aware that many of them have special nutritional or even medicinal properties and can be used to help with a variety of health issues. Some favourites include

### **Garlic – for heart health and as a natural antibiotic**

- An everyday super food with strong anti-viral, anti-bacterial and anti-fungal properties, used medicinally for more than 5,000 years
- Contains sulphur-based compounds shown to help cardiovascular health, helping to reduce blood pressure, formation of blood clots and hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis)
- Contains a potent plant compound called allicin. This is stored in the cell walls of the garlic and activated by an enzyme when the clove is cut. To get maximum allicin levels (and health benefits) from garlic, chop or grate garlic and leave at least 5 minutes before cooking
- Eat lots of it! Add to soups, casseroles, salad dressings..... Roast bulbs whole and squeeze out roast garlic and add to yoghurt to make a dip or to spread on toast. Recommended amount for health benefit is at least one clove per day

### **Turmeric – potent anti-inflammatory**

- One of the most potent anti-inflammatory spices identified to date. More than 6,000 studies show health benefits
- Active ingredient curcumin provides turmeric's distinctive yellow colour and has powerful anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant effects. Also stains everything bright yellow!
- Studies have shown it to be as effective as aspirin and ibuprofen for some conditions, without any of the side effects of medical anti-inflammatories. Thought to be particularly helpful for symptoms of arthritis and Inflammatory Bowel Disease
- Also shown to be helpful with other chronic inflammatory diseases including Alzheimer's, cardiovascular disease and psoriasis
- Using black pepper together with turmeric is much more effective than using it on its own. An active ingredient in pepper called piperine increases bioavailability by up to 2000%
- To use, add to rice when cooking, add to curries, toss vegetables in a little turmeric prior to roasting, mix in natural yoghurt (masks the taste)
- Make a turmeric and ginger tea at the onset of a cold to help ease symptoms. Finely slice fresh ginger and turmeric and simmer in a little water for 10 minutes. Then strain and serve with a little Manuka honey or maple syrup, a pinch of black pepper and lemon juice

### **Ginger – great for nausea and indigestion**

- Very effective for nausea, especially motion sickness and pregnancy-related nausea. Has also been shown to reduce nausea in patients undergoing cancer treatment and post anaesthetic.
- To use, scrape the skin off fresh ginger with a teaspoon and grate into stir-fries, curries and soups. Add to smoothies, slice thinly and add to boiling water to make a ginger tea or try in healthy ginger cookies
- Store fresh ginger (and turmeric) root by scraping off the skin and freezing. Just grate what you need straight from the freezer

### **Cinnamon – to support blood sugar balance**

- Can help to support blood sugar levels and has been shown to reduce blood glucose levels in people with diabetes
- Has a pleasant, sweet taste and is very useful for those trying to reduce sugar, where a little dried cinnamon powder can be used instead of sugar
- Add to yoghurt, fruit puree, porridge and other dishes where you might otherwise add sugar. Or try adding to your coffee instead of some sugar
- To get the most benefit, need to be eating c. 1 ½ tsp dried cinnamon per day

### **Peppermint – great for IBS**

- Peppermint can help with IBS symptoms in both adults and children
- Anti-spasmodic and pain-killing properties helpful for gut discomfort, spasms and wind
- Peppermint oil can help to relieve tension headaches. Just rub a few drops onto temples, forehead or back of the neck. The same active ingredient (menthol) also helps to relieve muscle ache when rubbed directly onto sore muscles
- Easiest to use as a tea. Add some leaves to boiling water and leave for a few minutes
- A word of warning, while peppermint is great for digestion and IBS it can cause irritation for those with reflux

### **Fresh vs. dried?**

Both are good, although fresh will usually taste better and may have slightly more health benefits. Dried will have a more concentrated flavour. General rule of thumb is 1 : 3 i.e. 1 tsp dried = 3 tsp fresh

**Recipes using herbs and spices**

**Vegetable and lentil soup**

Preparation time 15 minutes, cooking time 25 minutes

**Ingredients**

1 tbsp. olive or coconut oil  
2 onions, peeled and diced  
2 cloves garlic, crushed or grated  
1 ½ inch piece fresh ginger, grated  
1 inch piece fresh turmeric, grated  
½ butternut squash, seeded and diced  
3 carrots, diced  
3 sticks celery, diced  
1 tsp cumin  
1 tsp mild curry paste  
1 cup red lentils  
1.5L vegetable stock (use Marigold or Kallo)  
1 tin coconut milk  
Salt and pepper to season

**Directions**

- Heat oil in a large saucepan, add onion, garlic and ginger and saute for 3 -4 minutes
- Add rest of vegetables and herbs / spices and saute for another minute, then add lentils and stock. Cover and cook for 16 – 18 minutes, until vegetables are cooked
- Add coconut milk, season and blend

Use whatever vegetables you have to hand. Add smoked paprika, cayenne, chilli or more curry paste for a spicier version.

**Healthier ginger biscuits**

Preparation time 10 minutes, cooking time 25 minutes

**Ingredients**

1 ½ cups oats (or use wholegrain flour)  
½ cup desiccated coconut  
½ cup flaked almonds  
1 teaspoon ground ginger  
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon  
2 ½ tablespoons coconut or olive oil  
2 tablespoons honey  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
1 – 2 tbsp. water – to help bind  
A few squares of 70% dark chocolate, melted (optional)

**Directions**

- Preheat oven to 150 C and line baking sheet with greaseproof paper
- Place all ingredients except water in food processor and blend for 15 seconds or until well combined. Do not overblend
- Add the water and process again
- Form into 18 small cookies and place onto baking sheet, flattening down each cookie and leaving a little space between each on
- Bake for 25 minutes or until golden brown and leave to cool
- Drizzle with a little melted chocolate for a more indulgent version