# Cooking with Herbs and Spices

*"Variety is the Spice of Life"*

May 2013

Healthy Eating Tip of the Month

**Herbs and Spices Defined:**

- **Herbs** are the leaves of low growing shrubs and can be used fresh or dried. Common examples include sage, parsley , basil, oregano, rosemary, dill, and thyme. Many herbs can be grown both indoors and outdoors.
- **Spices** come from the bark , root, buds, seeds, berry or fruit of tropical plants and trees. Examples include cinnamon, ginger, cloves, pepper, paprika, garlic, mustard and many more.
- **Seasoning blends** are a mixture of dried herbs and spices.

The old saying "variety is the spice of life" holds true in every aspect of life, including diet. Health experts recommend eating a variety of foods with many colors and flavors as a part of a healthy lifestyle. Herbs and spices are a powerful tool to diversify your plate and palate and have been used for over 4,000 years!

The benefits of cooking with herbs and spices go far beyond adding color and flavor to meals. Not only are herbs and spices used to add variety and replace extra fat, sugar and salt in meals, but they also provide powerful antioxidants while adding virtually no calories.

Cooking with herbs and spices is a fun and easy way to diversify meals in a healthy way. This month's edition of Healthy Eating Tip of the Month offers insight on the many health benefits of cooking with herbs and spices as well as tips on how to incorporate them into your diet.

*Cinnamon*

***Patient Food and Nutrition Services***

***University of Michigan Hospitals and Health Clinics***

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*Chives*

# Health Benefits of Cooking with Herbs and Spices

## Cardiac Health

Using herbs and spices to add flavor to meals is a great way to decrease salt intake. Decreasing salt intake is important for many reasons:

- Salt can increase blood pressure, especially in salt sensitive people
- High blood pressure is the #1 risk factor for stroke
- High blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease

A low sodium diet may help reduce your risk of heart disease, as well as stroke. The American Heart Association recommends eating less than 1500mg a day. Using herbs and spices instead of salt is a healthy and delicious way to decrease sodium intake and decrease your risk of heart disease.

According to the American Spice Trade Association (ASTA), spices such as *black pepper, garlic powder, curry powder, cumin, dill seeds, basil, ginger, coriander and onion* are the most effective dried herbs and spices in replacing the taste of salt.

*"An herb is the friend of physicians and the praise of cooks."*

*-Charlemagne*

*Garlic*

*Cloves*

## *Health Benefits of Cooking with Herbs and Spices*

***Weight loss.*** Cooking with herbs and spices is a great way to enhance the flavor of foods without additional calories from added fats and sugars. Removing 1 tbsp. of fat from a meal can remove up to 10g of fat and 100 calories. This could represent a 10 pound weight loss in one year! Instead of enhancing flavor through gravies, breading and deep frying, try adding some herbs and spices!

*Reduce sugar in meals by replacing added sugar with these sweet tasting herbs: *Allspice, anise, cardamom, cinnamon , cloves, ginger, mace, and nutmeg.*

*Nutmeg*

***Anti-inflammation.*** Researchers are discovering the protective roles of many culinary herbs and spices and their ability to potentially reduce inflammation. Inflammation is found to be a precursor of many chronic diseases including heart disease, Alzheimer's, and allergies (to name a few). Cooking with herbs and spices is a great way to reduce your risk of many chronic diseases while adding flavor to meals and every day life!

In addition to decreasing the risk of heart disease by lowering the chance of high blood pressure, researchers are finding that the use of herbs and spices in meals can decrease the risk of cancer, diabetes and other chronic illnesses.

The proceeding section explores proven health benefits and functional properties that cooking with herbs and spices has to offer.

*Fresh sage*

***Antioxidants.*** Antioxidants are substances commonly found in fruits and vegetables that decrease risk for developing chronic illnesses and cancer. Research has found that herbs and spices can contribute significantly to daily intake of antioxidants. Herbs and spices contain more antioxidants than most fruits and vegetables.

*1/2 teaspoon of cloves contain more antioxidants than 1/2 cup of blueberries!*

*Herbs and spices packed with the most antioxidants include *oregano, sage, peppermint, lemon balm, clove, and cinnamon.*

*"Spice a dish with love and it pleases every palate."*
*-Plautus*

# 6 Super Herbs and Spices

*Cinnamon.* Increases insulin sensitivity to help burn fat and calories. Tames nausea and stomach ulcers and is found to be a mild anti-inflammatory.

*Stir into cereal, oatmeal, yogurt, coffee, tea for added flavor, or even sprinkle on your peanut butter and jelly sandwich for a fun twist on a traditional favorite!

*Oregano*. Packed with antioxidants, 1 tsp of oregano contains as much antioxidants as 3 cups of broccoli! Also helps to loosen mucus, treats respiratory illness, and calms indigestion.

*Goes great in any tomato-based or Italian food such as pizza, pasta, and soups! Sprinkle on a grilled cheese sandwich for some extra pizzazz!

*Rosemary*. Proven to help inflammation in the body. It is being studied for its role in heart health.

*Try adding rosemary to marinades for meats or tomato sauces. It is also great in homemade breads and roles!

*Turmeric.* Found to reduce inflammation and detoxify liver. Also being investigated for it's protective effects on brain health and preventing brain function decline associated with aging.

*This yellow spice is commonly found in curry powder. Stir curry powder into egg salad, chicken salad, or tuna salad for a spiced up lunch! Whisk curry into sauces, dips and vinaigrettes!

*Thyme*. Found to stimulate the immune system and relax smooth muscles of the gastrointestinal tract. Research is looking into the benefits of thyme on respiratory health.

*Thyme goes great with meat-base dishes. Whisk it into salad dressings, creamy dips, or sprinkle it on cooked vegetables and fish!

*Cayenne*. Found to eliminate gas from stomach and small intestine, increases metabolism for weight control, and sooths sore throat, cold and flu symptoms.

*Add a dash to any dish for an extra kick! Try adding to hot chocolate or other sweet juices for a little zing!

*"Pepper is small in quantity and great in virtue."*
*-Plato*

# "Spicy" Combinations

## What Goes with What?

Soup: Bay leaf, chervil, tarragon, marjoram, parsley, savory, rosemary.

Salads: Basil, chives, tarragon, garlic, parsley, sorrel. (best used fresh in salads or added to salad dressing).

Fruit: Anise, cinnamon, coriander, cloves, ginger, mint.

Vegetables: Basil, chervil, chives, dill, tarragon, mint, parsley, pepper, thyme.

Cheese: Basil, chervil, chives, curry, dill, fennel, garlic, chives, marjoram, oregano, parsley, sage, thyme.

Bread: Caraway, marjoram, oregano, poppy seed, rosemary, thyme.

Poultry: Bay leaf, chervil, tarragon, marjoram, parsley, savory

Beef: Bay leaf, chives, cloves, cumin, garlic, hot pepper, marjoram, rosemary, savory.

Lamb: Garlic, marjoram, oregano, rosemary, thyme.

Pork: Coriander, cumin, garlic, ginger, hot pepper, pepper, sage, savory, thyme.

Fish: Chervil, dill, fennel, tarragon, garlic, parsley, thyme.

*Bay leaves*

*Cilantro*

# *"Spicy" Combinations*

## *Ethnic Spice Blends*

Japanese: Garlic, ginger, miso, sesame seeds, wasabi, tamari, nama shoyu.

Caribbean: Allspice, cilantro, curry, garlic, ginger, lime, vanilla.

French: chives, garlic, parsley, tarragon, lemon peel

Indonesian: Basil, chilies, cilantro, cinnamon, cumin, curry, garlic, ginger, lime, mint, nama shoyu.

*Tomato, basil and mozzarella. A classic Italian combination.*

Italian: Basil, garlic, oregano, rosemary.

Latin American: Chiles, cumin, cilantro, garlic, limes, chocolate, cinnamon.

Chinese: Basil, ginger, sesame seeds, tamari, nama shoyu

Indian: Anise, cardamom, chilies, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cumin, curry, fennel, garlic, ginger, mint, mustard, saffron, tamarind, turmeric.

Middle Eastern: Anise, cilantro, chilies, cinnamon, coriander, cumin, dill, garlic, lemon, mint, oregano, parsley, saffron, sesame, tahini.

Thai: Basil, chilies, cilantro, cumin, curry, garlic, ginger, lemongrass, lime, mint, tamarind, turmeric.

# Cooking with Herbs and Spices

## Recipes and Menu Ideas

### Easy Basil Pesto

Ingredients:
3 cups fresh basil leaves (packed)
2 cloves garlic, peeled
2 T pine nuts or sunflower seeds
1/4 tsp salt
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
1/4 cup parmesan cheese

Directions: In a blender or food processor, add garlic, pine nuts, and salt; process for approximately 15 seconds. Add basil leaves: using pulse technique, turning on and off, to shred the basil. With the machine on, drizzle in the olive oil to create a coarse mash. Add the Parmesan cheese and pulse to combine.

Makes approximately 1 cup.

### Pico de Gallo

Ingredients:
4 ripe plum tomatoes, seeded and finely chopped
1 small white onion, finely chopped
1/2 cup fresh cilantro
1-2 jalapenos, seeded and finely chopped
1 T lime juice
Salt, to taste

Directions: Combine all ingredients. Cover and refrigerate for about an hour. Enjoy!

# Cooking with Herbs and Spices

## Recipes and Menu Ideas

## Ginger Veggie Stir-fry

Ingredients:
1 small head broccoli, cut into florets
3/4 cup carrots, julienned
1/2 cup green beans, halved
1/4 cup onion, chopped
1/2 cup snow peas
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 tsp fresh ginger root, minced
1/4 cup vegetable oil
1 T cornstarch
2 T soy sauce
2 1/2 T water

Directions: In a large bowl, blend cornstarch, garlic, 1 teaspoon ginger, and 2 tablespoons vegetable oil until cornstarch is dissolved. Mix in broccoli, snow peas, carrots, and green beans, tossing to lightly coat.

Heat remaining 2 tablespoons oil in a large skillet or wok over medium heat. Cook vegetables in oil for 2 minutes, stirring constantly to prevent burning.

*Ginger root*

Stir in soy sauce and water. Mix in onion, salt, and remaining 1 teaspoon ginger. Cook until vegetables are tender but still crisp. Enjoy!

Tip: Add grilled tofu or chicken to make this dish a complete meal!

# Cooking with Herbs and Spices

## Tips and Tricks

### General Rules for Amounts

Begin with 1/4 tsp of most ground herbs and spices for the following amounts and adjust as needed:

- 4 servings
- 1 pound of meat
- 1 pint (2 cups of soup or sauce)

Start with 1/8 tsp of cayenne or garlic powder and adjust as needed.

Add red pepper in small increments as it intensifies flavor. *Remember*, it is much easier to add more than to adjust for adding too much!

### Equivalents and Substitutions

As a general rule, substitute fresh and dried herbs and spices as follows:

- 1/4 to 1/2 tsp ground dried equals
- 1 tsp crumbled dried equals
- 1 T freshly minced

### General Rules for When to Add:

**For fresh herbs:** Add near the end of cooking time or just before serving as flavor and aroma can be lost during long periods of cooking.

- Add delicate herbs (basil, chives, cilantro, parsley, marjoram, mint, dill leaves) near the very end of cooking or just before serving.
- Add less delicate herbs (oregano, rosemary, tarragon, thyme, dill seeds) may be added about the last 20 minutes of cooking.

**For dried herbs and spices:**

- Ground herbs and spices release flavor quickly. Work best in short cooking recipes or near the end of longer cooking recipes.
- Mild herbs such as basil and parsley are best added near the end of cooking
- Robust herbs such as thyme will work better during longer cooking periods.

# Cooking with Herbs and Spices

## Tips and Tricks

### General Rules for Storing

Moisture, light, heat and air can cause dried herbs and spiced to lose their flavor, color and aroma.

- Store in air-tight containers
- Store away from sunlight, heat and moisture (a cupboard or drawer is great)
- Do not store above any heat-producing appliances such as the refrigerator, dishwasher, etc.
- Try not to sprinkle dried herbs and spices directly from container into pan as moisture can get trapped in container.

### General Rules for Keeping

How do you know when it's time to toss your dried herbs and spices? Here are some general guidelines:

- 1 year for ground herbs and spices
- 2 years for whole herbs and spices

Buy a smaller container or from bulk supply until you know how fast you use certain herbs and spices.

*Chives*

If an herb or spice smells and tastes flavorful, it's probably still potent and good for use.

Label the date of purchase on the container with a permanent pen to know how long you've had it.

# Cooking with Herbs and Spices

## Tips and Tricks

*Substitutions.* Don't have a pumpkin pie spice blend? Don't sweat it! Combine the following ground spices to make a delicious, homemade blend:
1 tsp cinnamon
1/4 tsp ginger
1/8 tsp nutmeg
1/8 tsp allspice

*Did You Know?* The reason for Columbus's voyage in 1492 was to seek a more direct passage to the rich spices of the Orient.

Want some barbeque flavor without all the sugar? Try this spice blend on any of your favorite barbeque dishes:
1 tbsp. paprika
1⁄4 tsp. chili powder
1⁄2 tsp. crushed red pepper
1⁄4 tsp. black pepper
1⁄2 tsp. celery salt
1⁄8 tsp. garlic powder
1⁄8 tsp. onion powder
1⁄8 tsp. cayenne
1⁄4 tsp. salt

*Health Tips.* Variety and abundance are key. Use a lot of herbs and spices in your everyday cooking and use them often!

Chop or mince garlic several minutes before use. Chopping or mincing releases the disease-fighting compounds. Heat will kill these compounds unless you wait to add garlic to heat to allow the compounds to become fully activated!

*Coriander*

*Did You Know?* "Cilantro" refers to the leaf of the coriander plant while "coriander" refers to the spice made from the seed of the plant. However, cilantro and coriander are NOT interchangeable in recipes and have very different tastes!

# What's in the News?

*Healthy Herbs: 25 of the Best for your Body*

Find this article at:
www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/08/healthy-herbs-spices-healthiest_n_2089007.html

*Top 10 Herbs and Spices*

Find this article at:
http://abcnews.go.com/Health/video/top-10-herbs-spices-12759406

*Herbs and Spices that Promote Longevity*

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-maoshing-ni/spices-and-herbs-for-heal_b_828222.html

*For more information on cooking with herbs and spices, visit these sites:*

- National Institutes of Health
  http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov
  pubmed/17022438
- American Spice Trade Association
  www.astaspice.org
- Mayo Clinic
  http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/spices/MY01566
- Pubmed
  http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=herbs+and+spices
- Spice Advice
  www.spiceadvice.com

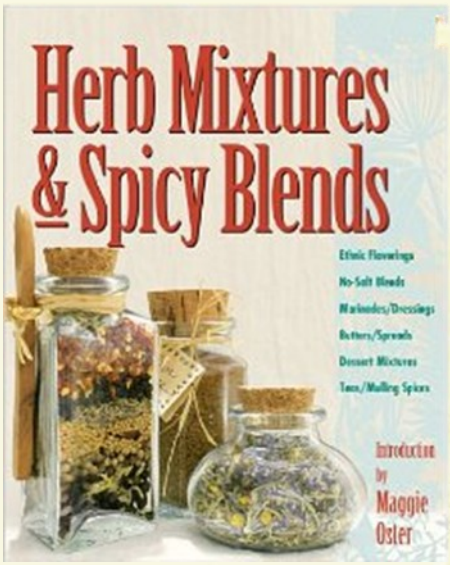
# Win a Prize!

Basil

*Don't forget to stop by the Healthy Eating Tip of the Month bulletin board in the UH Café for a chance to win these prizes!*

For more information on cooking with herbs and spices, visit the Healthy Eating Tip of the Month Bulletin Board in the UH Café!

Get growing with this gourmet chia herb garden set! Grow your own culinary herbs and spices anytime of the year!




After your herbs are grown and ready to be used, you will need some recipes to put them in! Get cooking with this awesome herb and spice cookbook!

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# *"Variety is the Spice of Life"*

Don't forget to check out other Healthy Eating Tip of the Month web pages located at www.med.umich.edu/pfans/services/tip.htm

University of Michigan Health System
Patient Food and Nutrition Services

***Questions? Please don't hesitate to ask!***

University of Michigan Health System


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