

# Spice Up Your Health



## Improve circulation, lower blood pressure, stimulate digestion, and help fight infections with pungent herbs

Spices like cayenne, ginger, garlic, horseradish, and black pepper add pungent flavors to the foods people eat every day. As celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse would often say, they “kick it up a notch,” due to their exciting action on our taste buds.

It’s no surprise these spices are called hot, because they have a warming, stimulant effect. What may be surprising is that they also have a cooling effect because they stimulate perspiration. In fact, if you look at where spicy cuisines like Mexican, Indian and Cajun come from, you’ll find that they are all warm, not cold climates.

There are many benefits to adding these spices to your diet or using them as supplements. They’re especially helpful for promoting healthy circulation, digestive function, and fighting off acute viral ailments. We’ll explore more about their health benefits shortly, but first, let’s look at what makes a plant spicy.

### What Makes Herbs Spicy?

The spicy nature of pungent herbs is due to the presence of compounds like oleoresins, piperines, sulphides, essential oils, and other compounds which have a stimulating effect on nerve endings. Oleoresins are combinations of a resin and an essential oil, which makes them less volatile. The spicy nature of capsicum and ginger is partly due to oleoresins.

Piperines are alkaloids that produce sharp burning or tingling sensations on the tongue, stimulate saliva, and often have a slight numbing effect. Spices like black pepper derive their pungent nature from piperines.

Various sulphides, compounds that contain sulfur, also produce a spicy sensation. Sulfur is used in detoxification processes and is naturally antibiotic. Mustard, garlic, and onions are examples of pungent herbs whose spicy nature is due to sulfur compounds.

### The Health Benefits of Spicy Herbs

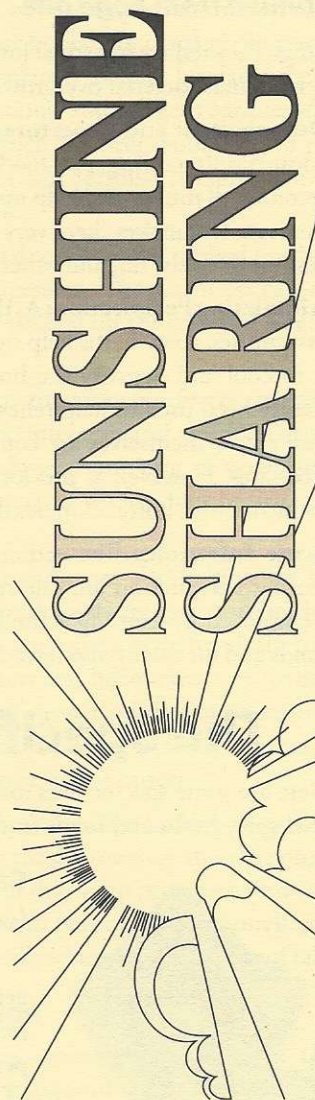
As we previously indicated, the benefits of these culinary spices aren’t limited to the flavor they add to food. They also offer numerous health benefits as follows.

**Improving Circulation:** Pungent herbs tend to increase blood flow, especially improving peripheral circulation so more blood gets to the extremities of the body. This not only helps tissues have a better supply of blood, it also helps to manage blood pressure. Spices can raise low blood pressure and have a moderate effect on reducing high blood pressure.

In addition, many spices help to balance cholesterol and reduce blood fats by stimulating metabolism. They may even help to reduce (and possibly reverse) the formation of arterial plaque. All this means that eating spicy foods helps reduce your risk of heart disease.

**Enhancing Digestion:** Spices stimulate the release of saliva and other digestive secretions, which enhances digestive function. They can also improve intestinal motility by stimulating the muscular movements in the intestinal system. This helps to prevent and relieve gas and

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Your guide to better health the natural way.

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bloating. They reduce intestinal inflammation and help to prevent small intestinal bacterial overgrowth.

**Decongestant and Expectorant Actions:** If you've ever had your nose run after eating spicy food, you know that spices stimulate the secretion of mucus and help move that mucus out of the lungs and sinuses. This makes them very helpful in relieving respiratory congestion in colds, flu, and other respiratory ailments.

**Stimulating Perspiration:** As they increase the flow of blood to the extremities, spicy herbs help open up the sweat glands, which helps to cool and detoxify the body. For this reason, they have frequently been used to help relieve fever, an interesting paradox because spices themselves are considered hot or heating, rather than cooling. However, as previously pointed out, it is precisely the countries with hotter climates that tend to eat more spicy food.

**Acute Infections:** The actions of relieving congestion and promoting perspiration are one reason spices have traditionally been employed in relieving acute infections, especially viral ones like colds and flu. Many also have direct antiviral, antibacterial, or

antifungal properties, especially those with oleoresins and sulfur compounds.

**Anti-Inflammatory:** In another seeming paradox, many of these hot spices actually help to reduce inflammation. Many are also antioxidant. This means they can help to reduce one's risk of many chronic and degenerative diseases.

**Pain Relieving:** Many spicy herbs also have an analgesic action, reducing levels of pain in conditions like arthritis. Some, like capsicum, have direct analgesic properties. All of them help to ease pain by improving blood flow to tissues, which brings oxygen and nutrients to promote healing.

**Enhancing Longevity:** All of this adds up to spicy herbs enhancing one's general health and perhaps even one's lifespan. In a 2015 study, it was found that eating spicy food six or seven days a week, lowered mortality rates by 14 percent. That's a very good reason to want to spice it up.



## The Specific Health Benefits of Nine Spicy Herbs

• Here are some specific uses for four major spices and five additional spicy herbs and foods from which you can benefit.



### Capsicum (cayenne or red pepper)

Capsicum is the name for a genus of peppers known as chili peppers. The heat of various peppers depends on the amount of capsaicinoid alkaloids they contain, the principle one being capsaicin. Bell peppers and other sweet peppers have little or no capsaicin, while habanero and Scotch bonnet peppers have a lot. Jalapeños and the pepper varieties used in herbal medicine, typically referred to as cayenne or red pepper, are somewhere in between these two extremes.

The capsaicin in hot peppers has many health benefits. It binds to receptors for *substance P*, a neurotransmitter which is involved in pain signaling. At first, it stimulates these receptors, resulting in the burning sensation, and then rapidly blocks them to numb pain. Creams or lotions containing capsicum or capsaicin are used topically to draw healing blood to an injured area to aid healing while simultaneously reducing inflammation and easing pain.

However, capsicum's primary use in herbal medicine is as a circulatory stimulant. It helps to equalize circulation so that all parts of the body receive their proper blood supply. It can help to reduce high blood pressure and increase low blood pressure. Regular use of capsicum helps to prevent heart disease, decreasing the risk of heart attack and stroke. For example, research on people in Thailand who regularly use red pepper as a seasoning suggested cayenne was a factor in the low incidence of potentially fatal blood clotting diseases that occur in that country.

Administering capsicum to someone having a heart attack may improve their chance of survival. Taken internally, capsicum has also been helpful in stopping internal hemorrhaging. It has even been sprinkled into severely bleeding wounds to help stop the bleeding. Of course, all these applications should be done while seeking proper medical attention.

Capsicum also benefits digestion, although its effect on stimulating digestive secretions is short-lived compared to herbs like ginger and horseradish. It also has some mild expectorant qualities that benefit the respiratory system. People who eat red pepper have also been found to have less chronic obstructive lung disease than other people who eat a blander diet. It can also be used to remedy colds and flu in the early stages. One study found that patients receiving capsicum three times daily for three days found a marked reduction in nasal obstruction and nasal secretion.

### Ginger

Ginger is one of the best stimulants for the digestive system. It enhances the movement of food through the GI tract, which relieves gas, bloating, and nausea. One of the herb's most well-documented uses is to relieve motion sickness, morning sickness and other conditions where a person develops nausea. It eases the nausea and helps to prevent vomiting.



Dr. Daniel Mowrey performed a study which showed that taking 2-4 capsules of ginger prior to travel, and taking an additional two capsules each hour while traveling, was 90 percent effective in preventing motion sickness. He also found that 3-8 capsules ingested prior to getting out of bed in the morning and 3-5 capsules



taken during the day at the slightest sign of nausea were 70 percent effective in reducing or eliminating morning sickness.

Ginger is second only to capsicum as a circulatory stimulant and is more easily tolerated by many people. Like capsicum, it improves blood flow to the extremities, reduces cardiovascular inflammation, and helps to maintain proper blood pressure. It is especially helpful for improving blood flow through the abdominal area, which may be one of the reasons it helps relieve congestive pain in that area during menstruation.

Ginger is also helpful for promoting perspiration and relieving respiratory congestion. Drinking warm ginger tea and soaking in a hot bath with some ginger sprinkled in the water will help rid the body of colds, flu, and other acute ailments.

Fresh ginger is anti-inflammatory and can be helpful for reducing intestinal inflammation and easing pain in joints. A great way to get this anti-inflammatory and pain relieving benefit from ginger is to juice four apples with a one inch piece of fresh ginger rhizome and half a lemon. Drinking this helps with both acute viral infections and pain and inflammation throughout the body.

## Garlic

Another pungent plant that improves cardiovascular function is garlic. There is ample research showing that the regular consumption of garlic has positive effects on the heart and circulation. It helps to lower high blood pressure and to prevent (and possibly even reverse) hardening of the arteries. It also helps reduce levels of blood fats and triglycerides. In aiding circulation, garlic combines very well with capsicum and ginger.

The spicy nature of garlic is due to its sulfur compounds, which also make it useful for fighting infections of all kinds. In fact, garlic has been called *nature's penicillin*. But unlike antibiotics, which only work on bacteria, garlic is also antifungal, antiviral, and antiparasitic. And, it even contains polysaccharides which feed the friendly intestinal flora, which helps improve the balance of gut microbes rather than disrupting it.

While dried garlic is great for circulation, fresh garlic is better for infections. When garlic is chewed, chopped, or smashed, its alliin (a substance with no smell or taste) mixes with the enzyme allinase to create allicin (a sulfur compound which gives garlic its pungent smell and taste). Allicin is the substance in garlic that is most effective against infections and is particularly helpful for respiratory infections, especially in the lungs, as well as coughs, colds, yeast infections like athlete's foot and Candidiasis, and parasites like ringworm.



## Additional Help and Information

For more information about the benefits of spicy or pungent herbs for your health, contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also consult the following resources:

<https://www.bmj.com/content/351/bmj.h3942>

*The Encyclopedia of Herbal Medicine* by Andrew Chevallier

*Strategies for Health* by Steven Horne

Allicin breaks down into other compounds (which aide circulation) in about twenty-four hours. So, dried garlic powder in capsules is helpful for the circulatory system, but lacks the power of fresh garlic in fighting infections. You can get a *Stabilized Allicin Formula* containing allicin which has been bound up to prevent it's breakdown. One tablet of this formula is equivalent to approximately one clove of garlic.

Garlic extracted in a vegetable oil can be rubbed on the chest and back to relieve lung congestion. The warm oil can also be dropped into the ears and/or rubbed on the ears and sides of the neck to help relieve earaches.

Garlic is useful in enemas for reducing fevers, relieving respiratory congestion, earaches, infection and worms. For a garlic enema, blend one chopped clove in one pint of warm water or use six to eight capsules and steep as tea for three to five minutes. Strain before using.

The sulfur compounds in garlic are also helpful for sulphation, an enzymatic pathway for detoxifying chemicals in the liver. Sulphation helps break down environmental chemicals, food additives, excess neurotransmitters and hormones, and toxins from intestinal bacteria. The lack of proper sulphation increases one's risk for cancer and neurological disorders. In fact, garlic has several actions that help to reduce one's risk of cancer.

When you consider all these benefits, a clove of garlic a day will probably do more to keep the doctor away than the proverbial apple. Unfortunately, the smell may keep more people away than just the doctor. Taking garlic with parsley or chlorophyll, or using tablets with stabilized allicin will reduce this side effect of taking it.



## Cinnamon

A spicy, aromatic herb used in Chinese herbalism as a warming stimulant, cinnamon is useful as a digestive and circulatory stimulant. Modern research has shown that cinnamon can help to reduce blood sugar levels. Cinnamon also has astringent properties and can help control heavy menstrual flows and postpartum bleeding.

The pungent nature of cinnamon is due to its essential oil which is mostly composed of cinnamaldehyde, a compound that is both antibacterial and antifungal. It also contains antiseptic terpenes. The warming nature of cinnamon makes it helpful for people who feel tired and cold, and may be suffering from poor immunity.

Cinnamon is traditionally used in combination with other herbs to help GI tract problems such as gas and bloating. The essential oils in cinnamon also help to regulate gut flora and fight intestinal infections. The tannins, which give the herb its astringent properties, tone up the digestive membranes and dry out excessive secretions.

Cinnamon is astringent enough that you can't swallow a spoonful of it. The minute you put it into your mouth your saliva completely dries out, making it impossible to swallow.

As an astringent, cinnamon has also been used as a styptic to help slow bleeding problems such as menorrhagia and nosebleeds. It has also been historically used to help diarrhea.

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### **Black Pepper**

Black pepper is one of the most commonly used spices in the world. Besides being a staple in most kitchens, black pepper has many health benefits. It contains a potent antioxidant called piperine, which has anti-inflammatory properties. Studies show that black pepper may reduce your risk of Alzheimer's, cancer, and blood sugar problems.



Like most spices, it stimulates digestion and eases gas and bloating. In Ayurvedic medicine it is considered a catalyst, a remedy that enhances the benefits of other herbs like turmeric. In Russia, vodka infused with black pepper or garlic is a common folk remedy for colds. If you want to use black pepper medicinally, the freshly ground peppercorns are much more potent than the ground black pepper.

### **Horseradish**

Horseradish is a very good remedy for people who have a hard time digesting and metabolizing protein. Consumed with meat it helps stimulate both the digestion and metabolism of protein, especially red meat.



The other major use for horseradish is as a stimulating expectorant for the lungs and sinuses. It helps to loosen and expel mucus and has been used for easing respiratory congestion in colds, allergies, hay fever, and cough. The sulfurated essential oils in horseradish are also helpful for fighting infection.

### **Mustard**

Although mustard seeds are more frequently used as a condiment than a medicine, they are a valuable medicinal spice. Mustard, like

horseradish, is sulphurous in nature and has a powerful influence on the lungs and sinuses. Taken internally, mustard can help to clear the sinuses and aid the expulsion of mucus from the lungs.

Mustard also stimulates digestion and is a helpful remedy for people who have poor appetite and difficulty digesting fat and protein. It is also stimulating to the mind, helping to relieve gloomy, depressed feelings.

### **Onions**

Although we most often use onions as food, onion has many of the same medicinal properties as garlic. It is just not as strong. Being sulphurous in nature, fresh (not cooked) onion helps fight infection and clear congestion from the respiratory system.

You can make a simple cough syrup by slicing an onion, sprinkling brown sugar on each slice and layering the slices. The sugar will pull the juices out of the onion to make a helpful remedy for coughs and colds.

A baked onion can also be sliced in half and placed, warm, but not hot, over the ear to ease earaches. You can also press the juice out of a baked onion and use it as drops in the ear.

### **Watercress**

Watercress is a member of the mustard family, along with horseradish and mustard, so it also contains sulphur compounds that help fight infection, improve liver detoxification, and break up mucus in the system. Watercress is also high in vitamin C.

### **In Summary**

These aren't the only spices with medicinal value, and we haven't even covered all the uses for the ones we've listed here. But, what should be clear is that spicing up your diet with these pungent remedies can have wide-ranging health benefits.

If you're not used to eating spicy food, you may wish to start slowly in incorporating these beneficial plants into your diet, but doing so will have major benefits for your overall health and vitality.