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POPULAR ARTICLE



Common Kitchen spices with magical health benefits

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Spices and condiments are crucial part of Indian diets. They are used as condiments and seasonings for a wide variety of Indian dishes as they add and enhance flavour, taste and colour. They have good anti-oxidant functions, preservative properties as well as anti-microbial and antibiotic properties resulting in their wide use for medicinal purposes. Some of the spices are rich in iron, vitamins, trace metals and potassium. India has a remarkable place in production and utilization of spices and therefore known as the “Home of Spices”. About 60 varieties of spices such as pepper, cardamom, chillies, ginger, turmeric, coriander, cumin, cinnamon, garlic etc are grown in the country. India exports only a small quantity of spices to 130 countries in the world and the remaining is consumed in the Indian market, owing to their immense domestic demand. Currently, India is one of the major producers of ginger and turmeric in the world besides other spices. The magical role of few commonly used spices in the Indian households is highlighted below:

Cardamom

Cardamom also known as *elaichi* has its origin from India, Bhutan, Nepal, and Indonesia. It is the world's third most expensive and popular that is a rich source of vitamin A and vitamin C, calcium, iron and zinc. It promotes heart health, aids in digestion, enhances oral health, helps in diabetes, fighting depression, fights asthma, prevents blood clots and treats skin infections. Ground form of cardamom is widely used to give Indian tea, curries and rice an awesome flavour boost. Usually a small amount is used, as too much of it overpower the main characteristic flavour of the dish. This aromatic spice is packed with numerous health benefits and has a renowned place in traditional medicine for centuries. Evidences shows that this herb has antioxidant

properties and has the potential to produce compounds that help fight against cancer cells. It is also widely used an assortment of Indian sweets.

Cinnamon

It is one of the favorite household spices which have been used throughout the world for ages. It has large number of antioxidants which protects body from various diseases and has many anti-inflammatory functions. Cinnamon forms a part of many exotic dishes and is currently trending because of its ability to reduce bloating of tummy. Cinnamon is very popular spice that finds its place in all sorts of recipes and baked goods. The oily component of this aromatic spice has a high content of cinnamaldehyde, which is thought to be responsible for most of its powerful effects on health and metabolism. The anti-inflammatory properties owned by this spice prevent the formation of free radicals that damage cells and nervous system, and also help

Cinnamon really plays a vital and true role in maintaining blood sugar levels. It lowers blood sugar by several mechanisms, including by slowing the breakdown of carbohydrates in the digestive tract and improving insulin sensitivity. Many researchers have claimed that cinnamon can lower fasting blood sugars by 10-29 per cent in diabetic patients, which is a significant amount.

Coriander

It is a commonly used spice often known by the name cilantro or *dhaniya* packed with essential health benefits. It is not only beneficial when consumed fresh but adding coriander seeds to our daily cooking is also very healthy. Coriander seeds have antioxidant properties and dietary fiber that promotes the healthy working of the liver and facilitate bowel moments. Consumption of seeds aid in the generation of digestive compounds and juices that facilitate the digestion phenomenon. In the event of indigestion, adding coriander seeds in our foods makes a remarkable difference. Both the seeds and fresh leaves are widely used in Indian cooking displaying its dual role as spice and garnishing asset. It is a key element in garam masala (a blend of ground spices). This super food claims to have anti-microbial and anti-fungal properties and is known to reduce blood pressure, blood sugar levels and cholesterol levels. Usually coriander seed impart remarkable taste in *aloo tikki* and *samosa* (a fried or baked triangular puff filled with potatoes, onions, peas or lentils) most relished Indian dishes.

Cumin

This seed has a bitter taste but is an essential part to Middle Eastern cuisines. It has the ability to aid digestion, improve immunity and treat skin disorders, insomnia, respiratory disorders, asthma, bronchitis and anemia. Since old times, a glass of zeera water has been used in Indian household as a common remedy for digestive disorders. In traditional medicine it has long been used as a rich source of iron. It is rich in antioxidants and exhibit anti-microbial and anti-inflammatory properties. Studies have shown that cumin aid in digestion, help in reducing food-borne infections and when added to a low-calorie diet enhances weight loss.

Ginger

Ginger is known to have originated in China and owns a place in traditional therapies. It has been used to help digestion, reduce nausea and help fight the flu and common cold. It is one of the most important ingredients in the traditional kadha recipe (Indian recipe). Research shows that ginger possesses hundreds of compounds and metabolites (a substance necessary for metabolism) few of them contribute to health and healing. Ginger is associated with reducing nausea, pain and inflammation and is known to enhance digestion of food. Studies have consistently shown that 1 gram or more of ginger can successfully treat nausea. This includes nausea caused by morning sickness, chemotherapy and sea sickness. It is a magic ingredient in Indian cuisine like chickpea stew, *aloo gobi* (a dish of potatoes and cauliflower), *matar paneer* (paneer and peas in tomato curry), *dal makhani* (lentil dal cooked with milk, butter) and many more.

Fenugreek

Fenugreek is commonly used in Ayurveda, especially to enhance libido and masculinity. This spice has many medicinal uses like it improves digestion, is known to increase libido in men, promotes milk flow in mothers, helps those suffering from eating disorders, reduces inflammation and also have beneficial effects on blood sugar. Several researches have shown that at least 1 gram of fenugreek extract per day can lower blood sugar levels, particularly in diabetics.

Saffron

It comes from a flower and has bright yellow color and a very distinctive aroma. It is often used in cooking to give its color and essence to the food. It helps manage asthma, aids in menstrual problems and soothes dry skin.

Turmeric

Relative of the ginger root, turmeric have plentiful of health benefits like it is packed with antioxidant, anti-viral, anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, anti-carcinogenic (destroys the free radicals in the body that damage the cells), anti-mutagenic and anti-inflammatory properties. It is good for brain, relieves arthritis, prevents cancer and has wound healing properties. Characteristic yellow colour in many Indian dishes is due to bright yellow colour of turmeric. It has been used in India for thousands of years as a spice and medicinal herb. Research has shown that it contains curcumin which is the main active ingredient in turmeric. Turmeric is also used as a dietary supplement to treat inflammatory arthritis, as well as stomach, skin, liver and gall bladder problems.

Note: *Indian cuisine are made with spices that have numerous health benefits especially festive snacks, but these may also be high in sugar or fat content. So consumption in moderation is always advisable.*