

Spice it Up!

The holidays are coming to a close but the cold and flu season has just begun. The cold weather makes it hard for the body to fight viruses and bacteria, so it is important to eat a variety of foods during the winter season to help boost the immune system. A way to do this is by eating lots of nutritious foods such as fruits, vegetables, lean meats, and whole grains. It is also important to add spices to dishes as well to make a dish more nutritious. Spices are made naturally from seeds, fruits, root, bark, or other plant materials, unlike herbs which come from leaves, flowers, and stems of plants. Spices help with immunity because they contain phytochemicals which are chemical compounds found in plants. Many phytochemicals contain antioxidants which are essential to the body, because they prevent cell damaging free radicals. Not only do spices help with immunity, but they create unique mouth watering flavors in different types of dishes. It is important to include spices when cooking in order to help boost immunity and fight off colds and flu. Below is some popular spices used during the winter season and the healthy benefits they provide. Sources: webmd.com, cookinglight.com, mccormick.com

Type of Spice	Flavor	Health Benefits
Cardamom	Sweet , strong, complex	Fights inflammation, lowers blood pressure, prevents cancer cell growth. Also high in magnesium and zinc.
Chili Pepper	Spicy, deep rich flavor	Boosts metabolism and keeps blood vessels healthy.
Cinnamon	Sweet, warm rich flavor	Fends off free radicals, prevents inflammation, and promotes brain health.
Cocoa	Sweet	Lowers cholesterol and blood pressure.
Cumin	Robust, smoky flavor	Rich in iron and can help promote weight loss.
Garlic	Aromatic, pungent	Contains allicin, which has shown in lab studies to help prevent heart disease and stop growth of cancer cells.
Ginger	Strong, spicy	Anti-inflammatory, and can help relieve upset stomachs.
Nutmeg	Sweet, nutty	Helps prevent plaque formation on teeth, and prevents cancer cell growth.
Turmeric	Strong, bold flavor	Anti-inflammatory and antioxidant.
Cloves	Sweet, aromatic	Antiseptic properties that can help with bad breath. Full of antioxidants, vitamins and minerals, such as Vitamin A, selenium, and magnesium.

*It's important to note that some of these spices come in supplement form. However, the supplement form is not regulated for safety, nor has scientific research supported that they are healthier options, compared to adding spices to dishes. Stick to the real thing and spice dishes up with lots of spices. Not only does it enhance flavors in food but can also replace salt as a flavor enhancer. Consider buying spice blends, because they can be cheaper than buying every individual spice. Also consider buying spices at non-grocery stores (or in bulk) because they might be cheaper.

Recipes

Chickpea and Kale Curry

Serves 2

Source: cookinglight.com

Ingredients

- 2 tsp. olive oil
- ½ C chopped bell pepper
- ½ C chopped yellow onion
- 3 C kale
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 tsp curry powder
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- 1 Tbsp peanut butter
- ½ tsp ground ginger
- 1½ C milk
- 1 C unsalted chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 1 Tbsp lime juice
- 1 C cooked rice

Directions:

Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium. Add bell pepper and onion; cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 5 minutes. Add kale and garlic; cook, stirring often, until kale is softened, about 2 minutes. Stir in curry powder, ginger, salt, and pepper. Add peanut butter; cook, stirring constantly, 30 seconds. Stir in milk and chickpeas, and cook, stirring occasionally, until sauce starts to thicken slightly, 12 to 14 minutes. Remove from heat; stir in lime juice. Place 1/2 cup cooked rice in a bowl. Top with 1 cup curry mixture. Serve

Nutrition: 1 Serving ½ cup: Calories 409, Fat 15g, Saturated Fat 5g, Carbs 53g, Fiber 11g, Sodium 595mg, Sugar 6g, Protein 15g.

Chicken Chili with Sweet Potatoes

Serves 5

Source: eatingwell.com

Ingredients:

- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 C frozen corn
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 C cooked chicken
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 C cubed sweet potato (½ inch)
- 1 medium bell pepper chopped
- 2 Tbsp chili powder
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 1 (15 oz.) can low-sodium cannellini beans, rinsed and drained
- 2 C low-sodium chicken broth or stock
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions

Heat oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add onion, garlic, sweet potato and bell pepper; cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are slightly softened, 5 to 6 minutes. Stir in chili powder and cumin and cook, stirring, until fragrant, 1 minute. Add beans and broth (or stock) and bring to a boil. Reduce heat, partially cover and simmer gently for 15 minutes. Increase heat to medium-high and stir in corn; cook 1 minute. Add chicken and cook until heated through, 1 to 2 minutes more. Remove from heat. Stir in salt and pepper. Serve.

Nutrition: Serving size 1½ cups: Calories 324, Fat 10g, Saturated Fat 2g, Carbs 35g, Fiber 8g, Sodium 570mg, Sugar 5g, Protein 26g.

Chili Blend Seasoning

Source: www.budgetbytes.com

Ingredients:

- 1 Tbsp chili powder
- ¼ tsp garlic powder
- ¼ tsp cayenne pepper
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- ½ tsp onion powder
- 1 tsp salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper

Directions:

Place all ingredients in a small container with a tight-fitting lid and shake to combine. Store in a cool, dark place.

This is a great way to experiment with different spices and modify them to a person's preference. Use this seasoning with meat rubs, chili, sauces, and more! Lasts up to 6 months!

If you try any of these recipes and have any comments or suggestions, please contact the Nutrition Coordinators. Either email Amber (amberl@foodbankwma.org) or Mariah (mariahm@foodbankwma.org) and tell us what you think of the recipes!