

Herbs and Spices Role in Human Health **Amelia Williams***

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Editorial

Herbs and spices have a long history of use, and they play an important role in cultural heritage, as well as in the enjoyment of food and its health benefits. Using scientific methods to demonstrate the benefits of foods remains a challenge, particularly when compared to the criteria used to evaluate pharmaceutical agents. Pharmaceuticals are distilled and condensed small-molecular-weight materials that are ingested. Food is consumed in a variety of ways, in relatively large, unmeasured amounts, in highly socialised settings. The main difficulty is identifying what these benefits are and creating strategies to expose them by scientific means, rather than proving whether foods, such as herbs and spices, have health benefits. When evaluating health benefits, it's important to remember the role of herbs and spices in the diet. This includes food group concepts as well as how benefits are perceived and, as a result, researched. Identifying bioactive substances in herbs and spices, as well as their properties as a whole food and/or in the sense of a dietary cuisine may be the subject of research. Given the role of oxidative modification of low-density lipoprotein cholesterol in the development of atherosclerosis, the antioxidant properties of herbs and spices are of particular interest. Eating a half to one garlic clove or equivalent daily can have a cholesterol-lowering effect of up to 9%, according to level III-3 evidence (National Health and Medical Research Council [NHMRC] levels of evidence). There is level III-1 evidence that 7.2gm of aged garlic extract has been linked to anticoagulation (in-vivo studies) and moderate blood pressure reductions (an approximate 5.5% decrease in systolic blood pressure). The anti-carcinogenic properties of a variety of bioactive compounds found in herbs and spices have been studied in animals, but the task now is to integrate this information to see if any results can be detected in humans and within specific cuisines. Researchers studying the impact of herbs and spices on mental health should

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differentiate between age-related cognitive impairment and acute effects on psychological and cognitive performance. Some herbal supplements have level I and II evidence for their effects on psychological and cognitive function. There is very little scientific evidence for the impact of herbs and spices on type II diabetes, with the best evidence being available for the influence of ginseng on glycaemia, but based on just four trials. More research is needed, especially into the effects of long-term consumption habits. Food extracts are being studied as an alternative to non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs in the treatment of chronic inflammation. The use of ginger to relieve arthritic knee pain has level II evidence; however, the improvement is modest, and the effectiveness of ginger treatment is rated below that of ibuprofen. It is necessary to do more thorough research. The Australian guide to healthy eating's food consumption recommendations do not yet contain recommended intakes of herbs and spices. More specific guidelines regarding their role in a balanced diet should be included in future considerations. Herbs and spices can be used in marinades and dressings, stir-fry sauces, casseroles, soups, curries, and Mediterranean-style cooking to partially or completely substitute less suitable ingredients like salt, sugar, and added saturated fat. When vegetables and vegetarian options are prepared with herbs and spices, they can taste better.