

Herbs and Spices Health Benefits

The following information is a brief introduction to the most common culinary herbs and spices along with some of their health benefits.

Caution: Since all herbs and spices contain medicinal properties, they should be used in moderation.

1. ***Allspice*** - Ground allspice is not, as some people believe, a mixture of spices. Rather, it is the dried fruit of the *Pimenta dioica* plant. It is especially used as a seasoning for meats, soups, and deserts. Allspice contains quercetin, a nutrient that helps to prevent allergies. Allspice also helps to provide relief from indigestion and flatulence.
2. ***Anise*** - Anise is an annual plant with a strong licorice flavor. It is used as a seasoning to compliment both sweet and savory foods such as cakes, biscuits, seafood and poultry. Anise contains medicinal properties that help to relieve congestion from allergies, colds and flu. It has also been used to treat digestive problems and to help relieve menstrual cramps.
Caution: Allergies are possible, but rare. Not recommended while pregnant or nursing.
3. ***Arrowroot Starch*** - Arrowroot powder is the edible starch that comes from the rhizomes (rootstock) of the arrowroot plant. It is used as a thickening agent in many foods such as puddings, sauces, gravies, jellies, fruit pies, and biscuits. Due to its great digestibility compounds arrowroot starch is used as a primary ingredient in infant cookies instead of wheat flour. The starch helps to soothe digestive conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome.
4. ***Basil*** - Basil is a tender low-growing herb that is prominently featured in Italian and Southeast Asian cuisine. It is commonly used fresh in cooked recipes, and added at the last moment because cooking quickly destroys its flavor. There are several varieties of basil including sweet basil, Thai basil, lemon basil, and holy basil. Basil is currently being studied due to its possible health benefits for alleviating conditions such as digestive problems, cancer, diabetes, high cholesterol, arthritis, and several others.
Caution: The safety of the herb has not been established for pregnant women, nursing mothers, or children under six.

5. **Bay Leaves** - Bay leaves are the aromatic leaves of the Bay Laurel Shrub. Fresh or dried bay leaves are often used to flavor soups, stew, braises and pâtés in Mediterranean Cuisine. Bay leaves have been used medicinally for lowering blood sugars and slowing weight gain.
Caution: Although bay leaves are safe to eat, they remain very stiff even after thorough cooking. Because of this, bay leaves are not considered culinary acceptable. Eating whole bay leaves may also pose a risk of general injury to the throat. This is the reason why all recipes that use bay leaves will recommend their removal after the cooking process has finished.
6. **Black Pepper** - Black pepper comes from the dried fruit (peppercorns) of a flowering vine. It is used as a spice and seasoning in many cuisines around the world. When the peppercorns are ground into a powder it is referred to as black pepper, white pepper, red/pink pepper, green pepper, and very often simply pepper. Recent scientific investigations indicate that the piperine in black pepper acts as an antioxidant, a pain relief agent, and it might help to prevent the spread of cancer cells. Ground pepper is eliminated from the diet of patients having abdominal surgery and ulcers because of its irritating effect on the intestines.
Caution: Avoid excessive use of black pepper (more than 1 teaspoon per day) if you take prescription digoxin (Lanoxin) or phenytoin (Dilantin). Too much pepper may slow the rate at which the liver clears these medications from the bloodstream.
7. **Caraway** - The Caraway plant has been used for a variety of purposes dating all the way back to 3000 BC. Caraway seeds, also referred to as the fruit, are used to give a distinctive flavor to rye bread, cabbage, sauerkraut, sausage, cheese, and soups. It has been used as a remedy for menstrual cramps, gallbladder spasms, loss of appetite, digestive disorders, and to dispel worms.
8. **Cardamom** - There are two species of cardamom, Elettaria and Amomum, also known as green and black cardamom. They are both used as spices for foods and drinks. Cardamom helps to prevent flatulence and may also help to prevent Colon Cancer. Cardamom is especially used in cuisines such as pilafs, various rice dishes, meat and vegetable curries.

9. ***Cayenne*** - Cayenne peppers are members of the Capsicum family along with bell peppers, jalapeños, paprika, and pimento. The word cayenne usually refers to any type of hot ground chili pepper. Cayenne is actually from a specific type of chili pepper. To compare the relative heat of chili peppers, the Scoville scale assigns a number between 0 and 300,000 heat units. Each unit represents the amount of "hotness" a person would experience when consuming a chili or chili product. The higher the number, the hotter the pepper. Sweet bell peppers are rated 0 because you experience no heat when consuming them. On the other hand, cayenne pepper is rated at 30,000 -50,000 Scoville units. Cayenne is used medicinally and also as a seasoning for spicy, hot dishes. It contains a pungent substance known as capsaicin, which is responsible for the burning hot sensation that people experience after eating the pepper. Cayenne pepper is used commonly as a thermogenic and to improve blood circulation and general circulatory health.

Caution: Don't touch your eyes with your hands after you have handled capsaicin cream. Excessive use internally may result in gastro-intestinal upset.

10. ***Celery Seed*** - Celery is used around the world as a vegetable, either for the crisp petiole (leaf stalk) or the fleshy taproot. In temperate countries, celery is also grown for its seeds. Celery seeds can be used as flavoring or spice either as whole seeds or, ground and mixed with salt, as celery salt. Celery salt can also be made from an extract of the roots. Celery salt is sometimes used to season tomato and vegetable juices, meat roasts, and seafood. Seeds intended for cultivation are not suitable for eating as they are often treated with fungicides. Celery seed is a traditional remedy for nervous stomach and for relieving flatulence.

Caution: A few people have severe allergic reactions to celery. For people with celery allergy, exposure can cause potentially fatal anaphylactic shock.

11. ***Chervil*** - Chervil is a delicate annual herb related to parsley. It is used to season mild-flavored dishes. Sometimes referred to as "gourmet's parsley", chervil is used to season poultry, seafood, and vegetables. It is particularly popular in France, where it is added to omelets, salads and soups. Chervil has been used medicinally as a blood purifier, a digestive aid, for lowering high blood pressure, and infused with vinegar it has been used as a cure for hiccups.

Caution: Safety not established during pregnancy or nursing or for children under the age of 6.

12. **Chili Powder** - Chili powder is a generic name for any powdered spice mix composed chiefly of chili peppers, usually either red peppers or cayenne peppers, which are both from the Capsicum family. The spice mix may simply be pure powdered chilies, or it may have other ingredients included such as cumin, oregano, garlic powder, and salt. Some mixes may even include black pepper, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, mace, nutmeg, or turmeric. As a result of the various different potential additives, the spiciness of any given chili powder is incredibly variable. As a rule, the purer the chili powder is, the spicier it is. Chili powder is regularly used in traditional Indian cuisine. Today it is especially popular in American cuisine, where it's the primary flavor ingredient in chili con carne.

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13. **Chives** - Chives are the smallest species of the onion family. They are a common household herb, frequent in gardens as well as in grocery stores. Chives can be added to foods such as fish, potatoes, omelets & scrambled eggs, and soups. Their insect-repelling properties make them valuable as a pest control in gardens. Chives help to lower blood pressure. They are also rich in vitamins A and C, and contain trace amounts of sulfur and iron. Since chives are usually served in small amounts and never as the main dish, negative effects are rarely encountered, although digestive problems may occur following over-consumption.

14. **Cilantro** - Cilantro is the leafy portion of the same plant that gives us coriander seed, but the two bear little resemblance to one another in terms of flavor characteristics. Cilantro resembles parsley in appearance, and is commonly called Chinese parsley or Japanese parsley. It is used as a seasoning in many foods around the world. It adds great flavor to chutneys & relishes, soups & stews, curry dishes, and stir-fries. Like many herbs, cilantro's flavor diminishes with prolonged heat so add it to your dishes in the final five minutes of cooking. Cilantro is antimicrobial. It has also been used to settle upset stomach in Latin American herbal healing traditions.

15. **Cinnamon** - Cinnamon powder and sticks are derived from the bark of tropical evergreen trees. The name cinnamon is correctly used to refer to Ceylon cinnamon, also known as "true cinnamon". However, the related species, Cassia, Saigon Cinnamon, and *Cinnamomum burmannii* are sometimes sold labeled as cinnamon. There are two main varieties of the bark: Ceylon cinnamon and cassia. Cinnamon can be used as a flavoring agent for many foods including baked goods, squash & sweet potatoes, Indian curries, and beverages such as tea. Cinnamon has traditionally been used to treat toothache and fight bad breath. Its regular use is believed to help prevent the common cold and aid digestion. Cinnamon is high in antioxidant activity. The essential oil of cinnamon also has antimicrobial properties that can help to preserve certain foods. **Caution:** It has been noted by the German Commission E that some people are in fact allergic to cinnamon, with side effects ranging from an allergic skin reactions to mucosa. It is not recommended for medicinal uses during pregnancy or breastfeeding.
16. **Cloves** - Cloves are the aromatic dried flower buds of a small evergreen tree that is native to the Molucca islands of Indonesia. Cloves have historically been used in Indian cuisine as well as Mexican cuisine. In north Indian cuisine, the spice is used in almost all dishes, along with other spices. It is also a key ingredient in tea along with green cardamom. Cloves can be added to many foods including pilafs, pumpkin pie, and various rice dishes. Cloves have been used to alleviate pain, prevent and treat bacterial infections, settle upset stomach, ease toothaches, treat worms, and relieve congestion. Since cloves contain anesthetic and antiseptic properties, they are the active ingredient in many over the counter toothache remedies. **Caution:** Large amounts should be avoided during pregnancy. Cloves can be irritating to the gastrointestinal tract, and should be avoided by people with gastric ulcers, colitis, or irritable bowel syndrome. In overdoses, cloves can cause vomiting, nausea, diarrhea, and upper gastrointestinal hemorrhage. People who have kidney or liver disorders and those with a history of seizures should avoid the use of cloves. Severe overuse can lead to kidney failure, changes in liver function, dyspnea, and loss of consciousness, hallucination, and even death.
17. **Coriander** - Coriander is the seed of an annual herb in the family Apiaceae. The leaves are known as cilantro, particularly in America. All parts of the plant are edible, but the fresh leaves and the dried seeds are the most commonly used in cooking. Coriander is commonly used in Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, Indian, South Asian, Mexican, Latin American, Chinese, African and Southeast Asian cuisine. Ground Coriander is ideal for curries and spicy sauces. It can be added to other foods such as Asian salads, stir-fries, stews, and potatoes. In holistic and some traditional medicine, it is used as a carminative and for general digestive aid. **Caution:** Coriander can produce an allergic reaction in some people.

18. **Cumin** - Cumin is the dried seed of a small plant in the parsley and carrot family. It is the second most popular spice in the world after black pepper. Cumin seeds are used as a spice for their distinctive aroma and pungent taste. Cumin powder is a popular ingredient in many cuisines from around the world. It can be added to curries, enchiladas, tacos, chili, and other Middle-Eastern, Indian, Cuban and Mexican-style foods. It is also commonly used in traditional Brazilian cuisine. Medicinally, cumin has been used as a diuretic and to treat stomach upset and flatulence. In herbal medicine, it is classified as being a stimulant, carminative, and antimicrobial.

Caution: Be forewarned that cumin stimulates the appetite and may increase lactation in nursing mothers.

19. **Curry Powder** - Curry powder is a spice mixture of widely varying composition. It is a classic of Indian cuisine. In the Western world, curry powder mixtures tend to have fairly standardized taste, whereas in its original India there are many different curry flavors available to be experienced for the true gourmet. Most curry powders contain coriander, turmeric, cumin, and fenugreek in their blends. Depending on the recipe, additional ingredients such as ginger, garlic, fennel seed, cinnamon, clove, mustard seed, green cardamom, black cardamom, mace, nutmeg, red pepper, long pepper, and black pepper may also be added. Curry powder can be added to several foods including meat and vegetable dishes, noodles, couscous, stir-fries, and marinades.

20. **Dill** - Dill weed isn't a weed at all. It is actually a sturdy, delicate-looking annual that's been cultivated as far back as 3,000 BC. Fresh and dried dill leaves (sometimes called "dill weed" to distinguish it from dill seed) are used as herbs. Dill seed is used as a spice, with a flavor somewhat similar to caraway, but also resembling that of fresh or dried dill weed. Dill weed's flavor is mild and sweet, with slight hints of anise and parsley. Dill weed is said to be best when used fresh, because it loses its flavor rapidly if dried. If using dried dill weed, it is recommended that it be added towards the end of cooking or in recipes with low or no heat so that it retains its flavor and aroma. Dill can be added to many foods including potato salads, vegetable dips, salad dressings, fish and poultry dishes, and omelets. Both dill weed and dill seed help to settle upset stomach and are mildly antibacterial.

21. ***Fennel Seeds*** - Fennel is a highly aromatic and flavorful herb. It is generally considered indigenous to the shores of the Mediterranean, but has become widely naturalized elsewhere. It may now be found growing wild in many parts of the world, especially on dry soils near the sea-coast and on river-banks. Fennel can be added to many foods including soups, Italian sausages, pasta, salads, and tomato dishes. Fennel has been used to treat digestive problems such as stomach cramps, added to laxatives to ensure gentle action, used in teas to break up congestion caused by colds and allergies, and fennel seed tea is helpful in treating babies with colic (please see precautions).
Caution: Fennel seed teas are helpful for colicky infants, but fennel seed oil should never be given to infants or young children because of the danger of spasms of the throat.
22. ***Garlic*** - Garlic is a species in the onion family. Its close relatives include the onion, shallot, leek, and chive. Garlic cloves are used as seed for consumption (raw or cooked), and for medicinal purposes. The leaves, stems, and flowers are also edible and are most often consumed while immature and still tender. The papery, protective layers of "skin" over various parts of the plant and the roots attached to the bulb are the only parts not considered palatable. Garlic is widely used around the world for its pungent flavor as a seasoning or condiment. It can be added to many savory foods including curries, meats, potatoes, salad dressings, and gravies. Garlic is claimed to help prevent cancer and heart disease (including atherosclerosis, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure). Garlic is also being studied for its ability to help regulate blood sugar levels.
23. ***Ginger*** - Ginger is the underground stem (root) of the ginger plant. It is used as a spice and is also consumed whole as a delicacy or medicine. The juice from ginger roots is extremely potent and is often used as a spice in Indian recipes and Chinese cuisine to flavor dishes such as seafood or mutton and vegetarian recipes. Powdered dry ginger root (ginger powder) is typically used to spice gingerbread and other recipes. Ginger is also made into candy, is used as a flavoring for cookies, crackers and cake. It is the main flavor in ginger ale—a sweet, carbonated, non-alcoholic beverage. Ginger can also be added to winter squashes, carrots, teas, couscous, and spiced preserves. Studies have shown that ginger offers a wide range of medicinal actions including: lowering cholesterol levels, and relieving allergies, asthma, arthritis, colds, and nausea.

24. **Marjoram** - Marjoram (sometimes called sweet marjoram) is a perennial herb in the mint family. It provides the flavors of sweet pine and citrus. It is used for both culinary and medicinal purposes. Oregano is a close relative of marjoram and is sometimes called wild marjoram. Marjoram is milder and provides a more subtle, savory, and less peppery taste than oregano. Marjoram helps to prevent spasms in the digestive tract.

Caution: Women who experience heavy menstruation should avoid marjoram. The herb is not recommended for infants and small children.

25. **Mint** - Mint herb divides into two major groups, spearmint and peppermint. Spearmint is most often used for culinary purposes and peppermint is used for its medicinal properties and also to flavor sweets and breath fresheners. The leaves, fresh or dried, are the culinary source of mint. Fresh mint is usually preferred over dried mint when storage of the mint is not a problem. The leaves have a pleasant warm, fresh, aromatic, sweet flavor with a cool aftertaste. Mint leaves can be added to beverages, teas, jellies, roasted meats, syrups, candies, and ice creams. Mint was originally used as a medicinal herb to treat stomach ache and chest pains. It is commonly used in the form of tea as a home remedy to help alleviate stomach pain. Mint leaves are often used by many campers to repel mosquitoes.

26. **Mustard Seeds** - Mustard seeds are the small seeds of the various mustard plants. There are three varieties of mustard: black, brown and white. The yellow in the common mustard condiment comes from the addition of turmeric. Although mustard seeds are some of the smallest of all seeds, the mustard plant can grow to a very large size. Ground mustard seeds are the recommended choice when dispersing the spice into foods. Whole mustard seeds can be boiled with vegetables or used in pickling. Mustard seed can be added to several foods including pickling spices, marinades, salad dressings, barbecue sauces, and roasted red meats. Mustard paste can be made by combining mustard seed powder with water/vinegar and some seasonings. It can be used as a condiment. Mustard is known to be very helpful for digestion, and can help to speed up the metabolism. Mustard seeds are a very good source of omega-3 fatty acids as well as calcium, dietary fiber, iron, manganese, magnesium, niacin, phosphorus, protein, selenium and zinc.

27. **Nutmeg** - Nutmeg is an evergreen tree indigenous to the Moluccas (The Spice Islands) of Indonesia. Two spices are derived from the fruit, nutmeg and mace. Nutmeg is the actual seed of the tree and mace is the dried "lacy" reddish covering of the seed. This is the only tropical fruit that is the source of two different spices. Nutmeg and mace have similar taste qualities, but nutmeg is slightly sweeter and mace has a more delicate flavor. Mace is often preferred in light dishes for the bright orange, saffron-like hue it imparts. Nutmeg adds a tasty addition to cheese sauces and is best when grated fresh. Nutmeg is a traditional ingredient in mulled cider, mulled wine, and eggnog. Nutmeg can be added to several foods including cookies & cakes, cooked squashes, milk & rice puddings, cheese dishes, and sauces. In herbal medicine nutmeg powder is used to relieve or prevent flatulence and to break up chest congestion.

Caution: Nutmeg is a very weak hallucinogen; caution and moderation should be exercised.

28. **Onion**- Onion powder is a spice made from finely ground dehydrated onions. It is mainly made with the pungent varieties of bulb onions, which causes the powder to have a very strong smell. Onion powder comes in a few varieties: white onion powder, red onion powder, yellow onion powder, and toasted onion powder. Onions are an important ingredient in almost every culture's cuisine. Onion powder combines well in sauces, soups and spice blends without adding unwanted texture. It can be added to many dishes including meatloaves, soups & sauces, casseroles, and vegetables. In traditional herbal medicine, onion is a gentle herb for relieving toxicity and breaking up "clumps" of infections (sores or abscesses). Onions can also be used to induce perspiration to 'sweat out a cold," and relieve nasal congestion. Onions can also help to relieve abdominal pain.

Caution: Onion powder is toxic to dogs. Also, avoid using this product when there is profuse sweating.

29. **Oregano** - Oregano is an aromatic, slightly bitter herb in the mint family. It is often used in tomato sauces, with fried vegetables, and with grilled meats. Together with basil, it contributes much to the distinctive character of many Italian dishes. Oregano combines well with pickled olives, capers, and lavage leaves. It also works well with hot and spicy food, which is popular in southern Italy. Oregano is a popular ingredient in Greek cuisine. It adds flavor to Greek salads and is usually used separately or added to the lemon-olive oil sauce that accompanies many fish or meat barbecues and some casseroles. Oregano can be added to many dishes including pasta sauces & pizzas, Italian & Mexican dishes, roasted vegetables, salsas, hearty soups & stews, and flavored oils & vinegars. Oregano is high in antioxidant activity, due to a high content of phenolic acids and flavonoids. Additionally, oregano has demonstrated antimicrobial activity against food-borne pathogens such as *Listeria monocytogenes*. Both of these characteristics may be useful in both health and food preservation. In the Philippines, oregano is not commonly used for cooking but is rather considered as a medicinal plant, useful for relieving children's coughs.

Caution: Safety of use during pregnancy is unknown.

30. **Paprika** - Paprika is a spice made from the grinding of dried Capsicum (such as bell pepper). In many European countries, the word paprika also refers to bell peppers themselves. The seasoning is used in many cuisines to add color and flavor to dishes. Paprika flavors vary widely from country to country ranging from spicy to sweet. It is used as an ingredient in a broad variety of dishes throughout the world. Paprika is mainly used to season and add color to rice dishes, stews & soups, and meats. It is often smoked in order to draw out additional flavors. Paprika can be added to meat rubs, deviled eggs, Hungarian goulash, egg salad, and as a garnish for any casserole. Paprika is unusually rich in vitamin C and is also a good source of carotenoids. Capsicum peppers used for paprika contain six to nine times as much vitamin C as tomatoes by weight. High heat leaches the vitamins from peppers, thus commercially-dried peppers are not as nutritious as those that are sun-dried.

31. **Parsley** - Parsley is a bright green herb that is very common in Middle Eastern, European, and American cooking. Parsley is used for its leaf in much the same way as coriander (which is also known as Chinese parsley or cilantro). Parsley has a milder flavor than coriander. Two forms of parsley are used as herbs: curly leaf and Italian, or flat leaf. Curly leaf parsley is often used as a garnish. Parsley can be added to many foods including egg dishes, mashed potatoes, tabouleh & other salads, pastas, and vegetables. The most common use of parsley is as an edible breath freshener. Naturopathic practitioners often recommend fresh parsley as a detoxifier because of its concentrated chlorophyll. **Caution:** Parsley should not be consumed as a drug or supplement by pregnant women. Parsley as an oil, root, leaf, or seed could lead to uterine stimulation and preterm labor. Also, parsley is high in oxalic acid, a compound involved in the formation of kidney stones and nutrient deficiencies.

32. **Poppy Seeds** - A poppy is any of a number of showy flowers, typically with one per stem, belonging to the poppy family. The seeds of the opium poppy are widely consumed in many parts of Central and Eastern Europe. The sugared, milled mature seeds are eaten with pasta, or they are boiled with milk and used as filling or topping on various kinds of sweet pastry. All parts of the poppy plant can contain or carry the opium alkaloids. Eating foods, such as muffins, that contain poppy seeds can result in a false positive for opiates in a drug test. The test is true positive in that it indicates the presence of the drug correctly; it is false only in the sense that the drug was not taken in the typical manner of abuse. Poppy seeds can be added to several foods including breads & rolls, strudels & pastries crusts, fruit salad dressings, curries, and Vegetables. Poppy seeds are rich in linoleic acid and oleic acid, and unsaturated fatty acids.

Caution: If taking a drug test, be sure to declare the consumption of poppy seeds before taking the test, because they may show up.

33. **Rosemary** - Rosemary is a small evergreen shrub and a member of the mint family. The fresh and dried leaves are used frequently in traditional Mediterranean cuisine. They have a bitter, astringent taste, which complements a wide variety of foods. Rosemary can be added to many foods including dumplings, breads, meats, and potatoes. Rosemary is a rich source of iron, calcium, and Vitamin B6. It contains several antioxidants, and it can be used as an antiseptic. **Caution:** Avoid consuming large quantities of rosemary if pregnant or breastfeeding. Rosemary in culinary or therapeutic doses is generally safe; however, precaution is necessary for those displaying allergic reaction or prone to epileptic seizures.

34. **Saffron** - Saffron is a spice derived from the dried stigma threads of the saffron crocus flower. It has a very rich aroma and taste. It smells very musky and flowery and it tastes earthy and warm with a lingering bitterness. Saffron contains a carotenoid dye, crocin, which gives food a rich golden-yellow hue. These traits make saffron a much-sought after ingredient in many foods worldwide. Saffron has a reputation for being the most expensive of herbs and spices. Saffron powder is the ground form of stigma threads. Saffron can be added to several foods including Indian rice dishes, seafood dishes, chicken dishes, couscous, Italian risotto, and Spanish paella. Saffron also has medicinal applications. It has been used in the treatment of depression, epilepsy and menstrual disorders.

35. **Sage** - Sage is an herb that comes from an evergreen bush in the mint family. It is considered to have a slight peppery flavor. In Western cooking, sage is used in marinades to flavor meats, and it's also used to flavor cheeses and some drinks. In French cuisine, sage is used when cooking chicken and also in vegetable soups. Germans often use sage in sausage dishes. Sage is also common in Italian cooking. It is often sautéed in olive oil and butter until crisp, then plain or stuffed pasta is added (*burro e salvia*). In the Balkans and the Middle East, it is used when roasting mutton. Sage can be added to several other foods including various soups, casseroles, and bread stuffing's. Studies show that sage is an anhidrotic, antibiotic, antifungal, astringent, antispasmodic, estrogenic, hypoglycemic, and a tonic. It has been used to prevent blood clots from forming, and it has a long tradition of treating digestive problems.

Caution: Avoid taking excessive amounts of sage. The plant and tea made from sage should be avoided by pregnant women. Its long term use is not recommended.

36. **Sea Salt** - Sea salt is obtained by the evaporation of seawater. Generally more expensive than table salt, it is commonly used in gourmet cooking and specialty potato chips such as the kettle cooked variety. Historically called bay salt, its mineral content gives it a different taste from table salt. Table salt is pure sodium chloride, usually highly refined from mined rock salt (*halite*) or sea salt. Natural sea salt is rich in trace minerals, and is delicious without being overpowering or too salty. Unrefined sea salt contains many minerals that regular iodized table salt does not contain such as magnesium, sulfate, calcium, and potassium. Sea salt generally lacks high concentrations of iodine, an element essential for human health. Iodized forms of sea salt are now being marketed to address this concern. Sea salt can be used instead of table salt where the recipe calls for salt. It can be added to potato dishes, salads, roasted meats, soups & stews, and virtually any other dish imaginable.

37. **Savory** - Savory is a genus of aromatic plants related to rosemary and thyme. There are about 30 species called savories, of which summer savory and winter savory are the most important in cultivation. Both summer savory and winter savory are used to flavor food. Winter savory is preferred by cooks. It has a stronger, sharper flavor than its summer cousin, but it still blends well with thyme, sage and rosemary as well as most mints. The herb imparts a spicy, peppery flavor to dishes in which it is used. Savory plays an important part in Italian cuisine, particularly when cooking beans. It is also used to season the traditional Acadian stew known as *fricot*. In herbal medicine, winter savory has been used for flatulence and digestive problems such as colic, diarrhea and indigestion. Its antiseptic and astringent properties make it a good treatment for sore throats. It has also been used as a remedy for excessive thirst in diabetics. **Caution:** Savory should not be used in medicinal doses by pregnant or nursing women.

38. **Sesame Seeds** - Sesame is a flowering plant in the genus *Sesamum*. Numerous wild relatives of sesame occur in Africa and a smaller number in India. Sesame is grown primarily for its oil-rich seeds, which range in colors from cream-white to charcoal-black. In general, the paler varieties of sesame seem to be more valued in the West and Middle East, while the black varieties are prized in the Far East. The small sesame seed is used whole in cooking for its rich nutty flavor (although such heating damages their healthful polyunsaturated fats). Sesame seed oil comes from the cold pressing of sesame seeds. Sesame seeds can be added to several foods including breads, rolls & bagels, noodles, salads, sautéed vegetables, and ice cream (sprinkle on after toasting). Sesame seeds are rich in manganese, copper, and calcium. They also contain vitamin B1 (thiamine) and vitamin E. Sesame seeds are a good source of lignans, including sesamin, which are phytoestrogens with antioxidant and anti-cancer properties. Among edible oils from six plants, sesame seed oil had the highest antioxidant content. Sesame seeds also contain phytosterols associated with reduced levels of blood cholesterol. The nutrients of sesame seeds are better absorbed if they are ground or pulverized before consumption, as in tahini.

Caution: Avoid consumption of sesame seeds if you are experiencing symptoms of diarrhea.

39. **Tarragon** - Tarragon is an aromatic herb cultivated for its sweet, anise-like flavor. The fresh leaves and stems are used in cooking. There are two species of tarragon that exist, Russian and French. Both are shrubby herbs but the leaves of French Tarragon are dark green and have a more pungent flavor and aroma. French Tarragon is more commonly used commercially in its dried form. Tarragon can be added to several foods including flavored vinegars and oils, egg dishes, fish, and salad dressings. Its use in soups is not recommended because the flavor is too strong. Although tarragon has medicinal properties its most common use is as a culinary herb. Tarragon has an aromatic property reminiscent of anise, due to the presence of estragole, a known carcinogen and teratogen in mice. The European Union investigation revealed that the danger of estragole is minimal even at 100-1000 times the typical consumption seen in humans.

40. **Thyme** - Thyme is an aromatic herb in the mint family. It is widely cultivated for its strong flavor, which is due to its content of thymol. Thyme retains its flavor upon drying better than many other herbs. The herb is often used to flavor meats, soups and stews. It has a particular affinity to and is often used as a primary flavor with lamb, tomatoes, and eggs. Thyme, while flavorful, does not overpower and blends well with other herbs and spices. In French cuisine, along with bay and parsley, it is a common component of the bouquet garni, and of Herbes de Provence. Thyme releases its flavor gradually so add it early in the cooking process. Thyme can be added to several foods including casseroles, herb crusted meats, pates, tomato dishes, sausages, and cheeses. Thymol, an antiseptic, is the main active ingredient in Listerine mouthwash. Thyme is a strong antiseptic used externally for infected cuts and scrapes and internally for oral and respiratory infections. Before the advent of modern antibiotics, it was used to medicate bandages. Bath washes made from teas of thyme allowed to cool treat fungal infections such as athlete's foot and also vaginal yeast infections. Teas of thyme can be taken orally to treat allergies, asthma, colds, and coughs.

Caution: Thyme oil should never be taken internally. Women who are pregnant or nursing should not drink thyme tea, although small amounts for culinary use do not cause adverse effects. Do not take medicinal doses of thyme if you have a duodenal ulcer or if you have thyroid disease.

41. **Turmeric** - Turmeric is a rhizomatous plant in the ginger family, native to tropical South Asia. The plants are gathered annually for their rhizomes. The rhizomes are boiled for several hours and then dried in hot ovens. Then, the boiled rhizomes are ground into a deep orange-yellow powder (turmeric powder) commonly used as a spice in curries and other South Asian and Middle Eastern cuisines. Turmeric is very robust in taste and aroma. It can be added to several foods including stir-fried chicken, rice dishes, seafood, and vegetables. In Ayurvedic practices, turmeric is thought to have many medicinal properties and many in South Asia use it as a readily available antiseptic for cuts, burns and bruises. Practitioners of Ayurvedic medicine say it has fluoride which is thought to be essential for teeth. It is also used as an antibacterial agent. It is taken in some Asian countries as a dietary supplement, which allegedly helps with stomach problems and other ailments. It is popular as a tea in Okinawa, Japan. Studies show that the antioxidants in turmeric kill cultures of cancer cells from the skin, bloodstream, and ovaries.

Caution: Turmeric should be used in moderation. It should not be used for extended periods of time, because it can cause stomach distress. Turmeric is one of the herbal ingredients in Ayurvedic birth control formulas, so women who are trying to become pregnant should limit their consumption of the herb, and it should be completely avoided while pregnant. Excessive use of turmeric should also be avoided by people who have congestive heart failure.

42. **Vanilla** - Vanilla is a flavoring derived from the ripened fruit of the tropical vanilla orchid. It is the only orchid in the world that produces an edible fruit. The long, thin pods of the vanilla orchid are actually the mature fruit of the orchid plant. Vanilla is the second most expensive spice after saffron, due to the extensive labor required to grow the seed pods (vanilla beans) that are used in its manufacturing. Beans from each region have a unique flavor profile, but Bourbon vanilla beans from Madagascar are considered by many to be the world's finest. The warm, moist climate and rich soil produce vanilla with a deep, creamy flavor. Vanilla seeds or vanilla extract can be added to several foods including baked goods, icings & frostings, custards, ice cream & frozen yogurt, and fresh fruit salads.

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