

Body Balance: Protect Your Body from Pollution with a Healthy Lifestyle

Healthy Ways to Flavor Your Food

Using herbs and spices are a healthy way to add flavor to food and they may protect against the harmful effects of environmental pollution. We are exposed to pollution every day in our air, water, soil, and even our food. This exposure to pollution may have negative effects on health. Herbs and spices help protect the body by decreasing cell damage caused by the pollution that we are exposed to everyday. Reducing cell damage helps protect against the development or progression of various chronic diseases. Some herbs and spices are also anti-bacterial and anti-microbial, which helps keep the immune system strong to protect against diseases and pollution. Even though research shows that herbs and spices are beneficial to health, scientists have not determined exactly how much of each herb and spice should be consumed each day. In the future, there may be official recommendations, like



for vitamins. Incorporating a variety of herbs and spices into meals is flavorful and may have health benefits.

Flavorings in Our Food

Herbs, spices, and natural and artificial flavorings all add taste to the foods we eat. They each bring a unique flavor to foods.

On packaged foods, the front of the box often says “naturally flavored” or “artificially flavored.” This means the flavor is added, just like how vanilla flavoring is added to many baked goods. But these flavors include more than just vanilla. Food manufacturers may add blueberry flavoring to blueberry muffins, chocolate flavoring to cereals or cookies, or any other

flavor to any manufactured food. The ingredient list of a food label lists any added natural or artificial flavors. Unlike herbs and spices, flavorings are not known to have any health benefits.

Blueberry Muffins without the Berries?

Check out the ingredients list on a pack of blueberry muffins or bagels at the store. Does it have blueberries in it? More than likely, what appears to be blueberry pieces in the breakfast snack is actually small blobs of sugar, artificial color, and blueberry flavoring. Flavoring doesn't have any known health benefit. Choose products flavored with real fruits, herbs, and spices.

What Are Herbs and Spices?

Herbs and spices are healthy ways to flavor food. They are made from very fragrant plants. Herbs are typically derived from the leaves of plants and used for its fragrance, flavor, or for medicinal purposes. A spice can be the dried root, flower, fruit, seed, or bark of a plant and is used to flavor foods. Common herbs are basil, mint, and sage. Common spices are cinnamon, ginger, and cloves. They have been historically used both for their flavor and perceived health benefits, and many still are today.

Kentucky Herbs You Can Grow at Home

- Basil
- Rosemary
- Fennel
- Lavender
- Mint
- Oregano
- Sage
- Thyme

How to Use Herbs and Spices	
Herbs and Spices	Meal Ideas
Basil	Try basil pesto instead of marinara sauce on pasta. Add fresh or dried basil to salads and soups, especially Italian varieties. Sprinkle basil on top of baked or sautéed chicken.
Black Pepper	Black pepper is the most popular spice and is easily added to most meat or vegetable dishes. Black pepper chicken is a popular dish in Asian cuisine that can be made at home.
Oregano Rosemary Cumin/Turmeric	Italian-style burgers: Add oregano and rosemary to hamburger before cooking. Serve on an herbed roll or bun. Grill occasionally and choose lean meats.
Cinnamon Cloves	Sprinkle on apples, applesauce, sweet potatoes, oranges, or in tea. Clove chicken: Soak chicken breasts in orange juice overnight. Remove from juice, sprinkle on clove spice, and bake in the oven for a unique, healthy chicken dinner.
Ginger	Ginger goes well with most meat and vegetable dishes. Sprinkle ground ginger on for a simple addition.
All herbs and spices	Choose herbs and spices instead of salt to flavor your food and reduce sodium intake. Check containers of individual spices for meal ideas specific for each spice, and to learn which foods it goes best with.



Increase Your Intake

Herbs and spices potentially have a variety of health benefits. Try adding them to meals at home. The extra, natural flavor is both enjoyable and healthy. You can't go wrong with meals that are both healthy and tasty. You may also enjoy starting an herb garden. It is a fun hobby and that always provides fresh herbs.

Summary

Adding herbs and spices to meals has potential health benefits and may decrease the negative effects of pollution. The University of Kentucky is a participant in the Superfund Research Center (SRC), which conducts ongoing research on the effects of pollutants and hazardous chemicals on the environment and on the body. For more information, see Inter-Program (IP) publications 76 and 77. Good nutrition is one of the best defenses for staying healthy, even in the presence of environmental pollutants.

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