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Cook with these spices to transform your health

Cook smarter not harder with just five savvy spices from your local super-market

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Not only is the recipe for optimal health simpler than we thought, but you've probably already got all the ingredients in your pantry.



Neurologist Dr Brandon Crawford says many spices can enhance physical, emotional and neurological health.

For decades, a well-known chain has climbed the ranks of the fast-food industry thanks to their “11 secret herbs and spices” recipe.

As neurologist Dr Brandon Crawford explains, many spices carry the ability to enhance our physical, emotional, and neurological health.

Five spices in particular have been found to improve brain function and energy levels – and no, we're not talking about everyone's favourite nineties girl group.

ELEVATE YOUR COGNITIVE FUNCTION WITH BLACK PEPPER

One of the most essential ingredients of the wealthy elite in ancient Rome, black pepper has been used to enhance dishes for centuries.

But beyond its sharp flavour, the presence of piperine in pepper has been found to improve memory retention and cognitive function. Additionally, the common spice can help the body absorb nutrients.

“Piperine, the active compound in black pepper, can enhance curcumin absorption (from turmeric) by up to 2000 per cent,” explains Crawford.

“This synergy not only amplifies the benefits of curcumin for the brain but also helps in improving digestion and nutrient absorption, indirectly supporting cognitive health.”

STAVE OFF NEURAL DEGENERATION WITH NUTMEG

Known to contain the neuroprotective compound myristicin, nutmeg consumption has been linked to enhanced memory recall and slowed neurological degeneration.

“Nutmeg also has mood-boosting effects, which can contribute to a more focused and positive mental state,” Crawford says.

Being an antioxidant-rich spice, nutmeg also helps the body neutralise free radicals and decrease oxidative stress, encouraging a balance between the production and accumulation of oxygen-reactive species in cells and tissue.

Additionally, according to Healthline, nutmeg can boost a person's libido, improve blood sugar levels and even enhance heart health.

WARD OFF DIABETES WITH CINNAMON

While it may sound counterintuitive that one of the most popular baking ingredients will help keep your body in shape, that's exactly what Crawford confirms. Cinnamon, which can just as easily be added to savoury dishes, helps balance blood sugar levels by increasing insulin sensitivity and reducing insulin resistance.

As Crawford explains, a stabilised blood sugar level is crucial for optimising your brain function throughout the day, preventing neurodegenerative diseases from developing in the long term.

REDUCE INFLAMMATION WITH GINGER

Ginger has been readily used across a range of cultures for thousands of years – and for good reason.

Derived from the roots of the *Zingiber officinale* plant, ginger and its compound gingerol have long been praised for their antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.

“Ginger can help improve cognitive function by reducing inflammation and oxidative stress,” Crawford says. “It also aids in neurotransmitter balance, which is essential for focus and cognitive agility.” Ginger also counteracts the presence of free radicals, which cause cellular damage and ageing, and has been found to increase the body's ability to burn calories.

TURN BACK THE CLOCK WITH TURMERIC

Turmeric, derived from a variation of a ginger plant, provides many of the same benefits as its flavourful spice cousin. Turmeric contains curcumin, a compound rich in anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, meaning turmeric supports liver detoxification, and can even provide natural pain relief.

“Curcumin boosts levels of the brain hormone BDNF, which increases the growth of new neurons and fights various degenerative processes in the brain,” Crawford says. Turmeric has additionally been linked to easing digestion, lowering the risk of heart disease and cancer, and pain alleviation in the joints.