

Herbs, spice and all things nice!

Try these suggestions for warming winter drinks, using herbs and spices

Now that winter is well and truly here, it's the perfect time to get those herbs and spices out from your kitchen cupboards to make some warm and tasty teas that can help boost vitality and wellbeing. "Herbs and spices have been used for thousands of years for their nutritional and medicinal benefits," says nutritional therapist Sally Wisbey (www.sallywisbeynutrition.co.uk). "Even in the smallest of quantities, they can make a big impact on any diet."

"Herbs and spices are a great way to not only add additional properties to your food and drink; they're also a great way to cut down on some less-healthy ingredients, such as added sugars," adds nutritionist and registered dietitian Hala El-Shafie, (www.nutrition-rocks.co.uk). "Many also have inherent health benefits which, just by placing in your tea, can boost your health." Here we take a look at some popular herbs and spices followed by a few suggestions for some winter-warming drinks.

Mint

"This tasty green herb is fantastic for digestion and conditions such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome," says Sally. "This is due to its calming and relaxing properties which is why it is often served as an after-dinner drink. It is good for colds and flu, helping to clear nasal and chest congestion from its menthol oils."

Cinnamon

"Available in stick or powder form, this spice has numerous health benefits," says Sally. "It has been shown to help protect against heart disease due to its anticoagulant and anti-inflammatory properties. It also has an antibacterial action so can help prevent those nasty bugs during the winter months."

Hibiscus

"Hibiscus tea has some fantastic properties and is great to drink hot," says Hala. "It is particularly good for regulating blood pressure. You could add cloves or cardamom to this drink. Cloves have a number of health-giving properties but in particular they contain good amounts of vitamin A and beta-carotene. These compounds are known to have antioxidant properties."

Ginger

"This root herb has traditionally been used for thousands of years to help alleviate the symptoms of nausea and aid digestion by relaxing and soothing the intestinal tract, eliminating flatulence," says Sally. "Ginger has a powerful anti-inflammatory effect, helping conditions such as arthritis, period pains, headaches and migraines."

Turmeric

"This amazing spice contains high antioxidant levels, helping to protect healthy cells from free radicals that can lead to cancer," says Sally. "Its anti-inflammatory effects are so powerful; they have been shown to be comparable to modern drugs such as ibuprofen, but without the toxic effects."



Drink up!

Try these warming winter drink ideas

Hot water with ginger, honey and lemon

This drink is perfect for helping to fight winter colds. Ginger is ideal for reducing swelling and pain with sore throats, coughs and colds. Honey provides anti-bacterial properties whilst lemon is high in vitamin C to help boost the immune system. Add a pinch of turmeric for that extra boost.

Fennel tea

Soak fennel seeds in boiling water to give you a tasty herbal tea. This ancient herb is great for the digestive system, helping to relieve stomach cramps and flatulence. It is also a good aid for weight loss as it is thought to help suppress the appetite. Seep for five minutes.

Hibiscus tea

Boil 1.25L of water in a pan and add 3 tbsps of organically grown hibiscus flowers plus two cloves. Cover and steep for 20 minutes. Strain into a glass and drink. Some people add sugar to it but stevia or honey would be a healthier option.

Minty magic

Seep fresh mint leaves in hot water for five minutes and drink after a heavy meal to avoid indigestion. This is also a good drink to help calm your nerves due to its soothing properties.

Bedtime drink

Grate some fresh nutmeg into warm almond milk for a tasty bedtime drink. Nutmeg has a mild sedative action whilst the almond milk contains tryptophan which helps your ability to fall asleep.

