

# Indian Spices and their Medicinal Value

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## History of Spice

The history of spices is the history of humankind itself, with empires rising and falling based on the trade of exotic spices from distant lands, their intoxicating allure changing and shaping the very foundations of our society. Christopher Columbus set sail for the Indies (following the unorthodox notion of getting there faster by heading in exactly the wrong direction), he was searching for pepper. Not gold or jewels, but pepper and other spices. He never found the passage to the Indies he was hoping for, and he never found the pepper he was searching for, but the world was changed forever because of our passion for strange new flavours from faraway places.

The spice trade developed throughout South Asia and Middle East by at least 2000 BCE with cinnamon and black pepper, and in East Asia with herbs and pepper. The Egyptians used herbs for mummification and their demand for exotic spices and herbs helped stimulate world trade. The word *spice* comes from the Old French word *espice*, which became *epice*, and which came from the Latin root *spec*, the noun referring to “appearance, sort, kind”: *species* has the same root. By 1000 BCE, medical systems based upon herbs could be found in China, Korea, and India. Early uses were connected with magic, medicine, religion, tradition, and preservation.

A **spice** is a seed, fruit, root, bark, or other plant substance primarily used for flavouring, colouring or preserving food. Spices are distinguished from herbs, which are the leaves, flowers, or stems from plants used for flavouring or as

a garnish. Sometimes, spices may be ground into a powder for convenience.

Right from the kitchen and medicinal uses in homes spices have an important role to play in different places. As India is blessed with a varied climate each of its state produces some spice or the other. No wonder why spices are used so extensively for cooking in India. Not only in India but also in some other countries spices are considered to be of great use.

Apart from adding colour, flavour and taste, consumption of spices provide infinite health benefits. You can be more creative in use of spices if you know its uses better. Some may be a substitute for your costly beauty products and even medicines.

## Commerce of spice

In world trade of spices India is at number three with 8.8% of the share. The major spices exported by India are Chillies (40%), Turmeric (10%), Cumin (10%), Coriander (9.5%), Fenugreek (4.2%), Peppers (4%) and others (19%). Though these spices provide innumerable benefits they should be used sparingly. The excessive use of spices in food can cause harm to the health. Try to make specific use of these spices. This will help to make optimal use of the resources provided by nature. Strike the right balance and add some spice to your life.

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DOI: 10.5530/ijper.51.3s.41

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### List of the important Indian Spices, their uses and benefits.

| Spices                    | Uses   | Benefits   |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Cardamom (Elaichi)        | It is used in most of the Indian and other sweet dishes to give a good flavour and smell. It is also used widely in pharmaceutical sector.                         | Helps to control bad breath and digestive disorder. A whole cardamom chewed is good for coping with diabetes. <sup>1</sup>   |
| Chilli (Lal Mirch)        | It is a main ingredient used for adding hot flavour to the food.   | The antioxidants present in chilli help to cope with cholesterol. It also helps burning calories. <sup>2</sup>   |
| Cinnamon (Dalchini)       | It is used for mainly for seasoning food and preparing masalas It has medicinal uses too.  | It supports natural production of insulin and reduces blood cholesterol  |
| Clove (Laung)             | It is used as a cooking ingredient mainly for seasoning or preparing Masalas.  | Clove oil is beneficial for coping with tooth ache and sore gums. It is also beneficial remedy for chest pains, fever, digestive problems, cough and cold. <sup>3</sup>  |
| Coriander (Dhaniya)       | Coriander leaves as well as coriander seeds are used in cooking. It also has some medicinal uses.  | It can be used externally on aching joints and rheumatism. It is also good for coping with soar throat, allergies, digestion problems, hay fever etc.  |
| Cumin (Zeera)             | It is used for cooking and it also possesses medicinal properties.   | It is a good source of iron and keeps immune system healthy. Water boiled with cumin seeds is good for coping with dysentery.  |
| Fenugreek (Methi)         | It is mainly used as a green leafy vegetable and seeds are used for seasoning and preparing Masalas. It also has medicinal uses.                                   | Fenugreek seed tea or sweet fudge is good for increasing breast milk. It also helpful for treating diabetes and lowering cholesterol. <sup>4</sup>   |
| Garlic (Lassan)           | It is used for cooking as well as for the medicinal purpose.   | It is useful for coping with cough and cold. It also has antibiotic properties.  |
| Ginger (Adrak)            | It is used for giving a specific flavour to food and has many medicinal uses.  | Helps to avoid digestive problems. It is beneficial for coping with cough and cold.  |
| Bishop's weed (Ajwain)    | It is used for seasoning and as flavorant as well as medicinal purpose   | Used in GI ailments including: diarrhoea, dyspepsia, flatulence, indigestion and cholera. In Ayurvedic medicine it is used as an antiseptic, preservative, respiratory and GI ailments. Unani system of medicine as an enhancer of the body's resistance. <sup>5,6</sup> |
| Nutmeg (Jaiphal)          | It is used in powdered form for garnishing and also for masala preparation. It is used in soaps, perfumes and shampoos. It can also be used for medicinal purpose. | It is beneficial for the treatments of asthma, heart disorder and bad breath.  |
| Pepper (Kaali Mirch)      | It is extensively used in cooking, especially for garnishing. It is has many medicinal uses too.   | It helps coping with cold, cough, infections etc. It helps to deal with muscle pains and digestive problems. <sup>7</sup>  |
| Saffron (Zaffran/ Kesar)  | It is used for cooking as well as in beauty products. It is mainly used in sweet dishes. It has good medicinal properties.   | It helps to cope with skin diseases. It is a good remedy for cough, cold and asthma.   |
| Star anise (Chakra Phool) | It is used in cooking and for medicinal purpose  | Star anise oil is beneficial for rheumatism. It is helpful for digestion and avoiding bad breath   |
| Turmeric (Haldi)          | It is used in cooking and skin care products. It has wide range medicinal uses.  | It helps deal with skin problems. Turmeric powder can be used for healing cuts and wounds. It also makes coping with diabetes easier. <sup>8</sup>   |

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### PICTORIAL ABSTRACT



### SUMMARY

- India produces a wide variety of spices including cardamoms, chilies, black pepper, mustard, coriander. Indian cuisine is also known for its rich taste which it derives from numerous spices.
- The demand of Indian spices is high in the global market due to their rich aroma, texture, and taste. India has the largest domestic market for spices in the world.
- The major importers of Indian spices are the US, Germany, China, the UAE and Malaysia. The primary spices imported from India are pepper, chili, turmeric, coriander, cumin, and fennel.
- Spices are generally used as Important food adjuncts help to avoid monotony, disguise unpleasant odor, Aid digestion, Increase rate of perspiration, resulting in lowering body temperature, carminative and antiseptic, antioxidants, anti-inflammatory, perfumes, soaps, incenses, dyes etc.

### ABOUT AUTHOR



**Dr. Sonal Dubey (M. Pharm, PhD)**, is working as Professor and Vice Principal at Krupanidhi College of Pharmacy, Bangalore, India. She has 21 years of Teaching & Research Experience. She has her specialization in Medicinal chemistry; and has Phytochemistry, drug design and synthetic chemistry as field of interest. She has guided 17 postgraduate students and 2 PhD students and currently 2 students are pursuing their PhD with her. She has more than 45 research publications in national and international journals to her credit. She has authored a book and one book chapter. She is editor of Journal of Pharmaceutical Chemistry; Associate editor for Indian Journal of Pharmaceutical Research and member RGHUS. Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences. She holds life time membership of various professional bodies like IPA and APTI.

**Cite this article:** Sonal Dubey. Indian Spices and their Medicinal Value. 2017;51(3)Suppl:S330-32.