Spice up your holiday
AND GIVE THE GIFT OF HEALTH

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'Tisn't just the season for sugar plums and candy canes. There are many more ways to spice up your holiday season, and the good news is that these spices can also jazz up your health quotient.

**PEPPERMINT**
Sure, the holiday season is rife with candy canes, but this isn't the only way to get a taste of peppermint. Aromatic peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*) tea has been used for centuries to soothe indigestion. It has also been used to relax the intestinal tract; relieve painful gas; and ease nausea, heartburn, headaches, morning sickness, and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Traditional use has been verified by several recent studies which have confirmed the benefit of peppermint in relieving the symptoms of IBS.

**CLOVES**
Holiday shopping can be a strenuous workout. If you find yourself stiffening up following a particularly intense outing, think about the soothing scent of cloves. The main active component in cloves (*Eugenia caryophyllus*) is eugenol, which has been studied as an anti-inflammatory to help ease the stiffness and pain associated with arthritis.

Cloves offer other health benefits, such as increasing insulin production and lowering cholesterol. In a recent study, extracts of cloves were found to improve the function of insulin, and to lower glucose, total cholesterol, LDL, and triglycerides in people suffering from type 2 diabetes.

**CINNAMON**
A traditional holiday spice, the scent of cinnamon evokes warmth and home-baked goodness—a welcome respite from cold winter chills. What's even more interesting, according to researchers in West Virginia, is that cinnamon (*Cinnamomum cassia*), experienced through the nose (as an odour) and through the mouth (as in chewing gum), can have a positive effect on cognitive performance, including memory.

Cinnamon has also shown great promise for treating people with type 2 diabetes. Researchers have discovered it has the ability, like insulin, to increase the amount of three important proteins involved in the body's insulin function, glucose transport, and inflammatory response. Studies have also documented improvements in triglycerides, blood pressure, and LDL cholesterol.

**GINGER**
If holiday bills are making you queasy, try some ginger. Well known for its effectiveness in settling a nauseous stomach, ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) can help curb morning-after-gift-shopping wooziness.

Ginger has been used for centuries as a treatment for nausea and inflammation. Modern researchers are now finding evidence to support this ancient wisdom. Studies have found a positive effect on nausea from morning sickness during pregnancy and the side effects of chemotherapy, as well as for quelling post-operative dizziness.

Research is also looking into ginger as an anti-inflammatory for treating the symptoms of arthritis. As well, its antioxidant properties could hold promise for conditions such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease.