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DR. CHARLES' HEALTH CHAT

A LITTLE SPICE IN LIFE

Christopher Morley is said to have defined spice as the plural of spouse, but according to Webster spices are “any of various aromatic vegetable productions, as pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg, mace, all-spice, ginger, cloves, etc., used in cookery to season food and to flavor sauces, pickles, etc.; a vegetable condiment or relish, usually in the form of a powder; that which gives zest or pungency; a piquant or pleasing flavoring; a relish, as variety is the *spice of life*.”

The effect of spices on health is an intriguing subject. Studies are showing not only their specific, physiological effects, but also the health in population trends where some diseases show low statistics where spices are regularly consumed. For example, in the Mediterranean region, where coronary artery disease is low, garlic is a regular part of the day-to-day diet.

In one respect, we could say what garlic is to the West, ginger is to the East. The culinary use of ginger in Chinese and Oriental cuisine is extensive. Ginger is very much part of the Chinese Materia Medica as well as its use in day-to-day diets. It is a perennial plant indigenous to tropical Asia. Long cultivated by the Hindus and Chinese, ginger (chiang) was mentioned by the famous Chinese philosopher *Confucius* (551-479 B.C.) in his *Analects*. It was one of the first Oriental spices known to Europe, having been collected by the Greeks and Romans from Arab traders. It is now common to most all tropical countries, especially here in the West Indies.

Ginger was introduced from the East Indies to the New World and was successfully transplanted to the West Indies early in the sixteenth century by the Spaniard Francisco de Mendoza. By 1547 Jamaica was already exporting to Europe sizable quantities of this piquant spice. In 1584 Santo Domingo also was exporting ginger, as was Barbados by 1654. In the middle ages, ginger was so important, that the street in Basel where Swiss traders sold spices was named *Imbergasse*, meaning “Ginger alley.” Recount Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labor Lost*, Act V, Scene I, Costard informs moth: “As I had but one penny in the world, thou shouldst have it to buy ginger-bread.” English tavern keepers used to keep ground ginger in constant supply for thirsty customers to sprinkle on top of their beer or ale and stir into the drink with a red-hot poker. Thus comes our gingerbeer.

To the Chinese, culinary ginger is a most important part of the diet. According to their medicine, ginger pulls energy down, thus preventing constipation as it helps regularize the bowels. An old Chinatown herbalist told the author that for curing cold, the treatment is simple: Take two cups of water, slice in ginger and scallions and bring to a boil. Drink the brew as hot as one can tolerate. Go to bed with heavy blankets and sweat. By next morning the cold is gone. It does work, but must be done at the moment one feels a cold coming on. Ignoring the signs, like Westerners do, taking aspirin or Tylenol, continuing to work the remainder of the day, etc., this technique will not work as the virus (perverse cold energy, according to the Chinese belief) will set itself into the body too deep, thus taking days to rid oneself of the infection.



Zingiber officinale: The latin binomial - zingiber - comes from Sanskrit, meaning horned, the shape of its tuber when pulled from the ground. The plant reaches a height to 3-4 feet. Most species produce white flowers, the Jamaican variety, however, produces a beautiful red flower. Medically, the root is a stimulant, carminative, relieves colic and intestinal upset.

Let's now look at some interesting recipes:

GINGER ORANGE RICE

1 small onion 1/8 tsp. pepper
1 tsp. oil or butter 1 tsp. parsley
1 tsp. ground ginger
2 tsp. grated orange peel
1/2 cup orange juice
1 cup long-grained rice

In a sauce pan, add oil or butter and simmer onion with the ginger until golden. To two cups of water, add orange juice and stir fry and bring to a boil. Add parsley flakes and rice, stir and simmer for 25 minutes.

GINGERED CARROT SOUFFLE

1 cup, cooked mashed carrots
1/2 cup brown sugar
1 tsp. ground ginger
1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground mace
1 tsp. vanilla extract
3 tsp. butter 3 tsp. flour
3/4 cup milk 4 eggs, separated

In a large bowl, combine first 7 ingredients, mix well. In a saucepan, melt butter, blend in flour and milk and cook and stir until thick and smooth. In a small bowl, beat egg yolks with a small amount of saucepan mixture, blend well, and then add remaining mixture. Add to the seasoned carrots and mix well. Beat egg whites until they stand in soft, stiff peaks. Carefully fold into the carrot mixture. Turn into souffle dish. Bake at 375°F for 45 minutes.

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