

Heart TALK

Heart-healthy and Stroke-free Living with Dr. Amy L. Doneen, DNP, ARNP

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*Thoughts from
Dr. Amy*

CURES IN YOUR KITCHEN: HEART-HEALTHY HERBS AND SPICES

Herbs and spices have been used as food and medicine for thousands of years. Modern science has shown that some of these tasty flavorings really do have remarkable health benefits, particularly for boosting cardiovascular (CV) wellness. Two very large studies recently linked a spicy diet to longer life and lower risk of death from heart-related causes.

One reason why certain spices and herbs literally do the heart good is that they appear to reduce chronic inflammation, a fiery process that is both the driver of arterial disease development and of plaque ruptures that can lead to a heart attack or stroke. Certain condiments may also help reduce other CV risks if consumed as part of an overall heart-healthy diet. Here's a look at spices and herbs with proven cardiovascular benefits.



CINNAMON

Lowers cholesterol and blood sugar

Daily consumption of this delicious spice significantly reduced triglycerides, blood sugar and LDL (bad) cholesterol, while improving good (HDL) cholesterol in a [recent analysis](#) that pooled the results of 10 randomized studies of 543 patients with type 2 diabetes. Two earlier studies found that cinnamon improved insulin sensitivity in people without diabetes. These are important benefits, given that insulin resistance is the root cause of about 70% of heart attacks.

Based on these findings, the BaleDoneen Method recommends that people with diabetes or insulin resistance take 2 grams of cinnamon daily, which is available in capsule form. Before taking any dietary supplement, check with your medical provider to make sure it's appropriate for you.

CHILI PEPPERS

May lengthen life and lower heart attack and stroke risk

Chili peppers may hold the key to longevity. In a [19-year study of 16,171 American men](#), those who ate hot red chili peppers had a 13% lower rate of death, even when demographic, lifestyle and clinical factors were taken into account. Mortality from vascular disease, heart attacks and strokes was particularly low in the hot pepper

group, [according to study coauthor Dr. Benjamin Littenberg](#), who points out that a chili compound called capsaicin has well-established anti-inflammatory effects. It's used to treat arthritis and other painful inflammatory disorders.

[An earlier study of nearly 500,000 Chinese people](#) over seven years also reported lower mortality, particularly from heart disease and cancer, among those who ate spicy foods, including chili peppers, frequently. However, further research is needed to tell if the food itself, or other behaviors of people who eat a spicy diet, explains the heart-protective effects seen in the study.

TURMERIC

Fights inflammation, gum disease and depression

Curcumin, an antioxidant compound found in the yellow Indian spice turmeric, has such remarkable health benefits that researchers have dubbed it "the golden spice of life." In a [recent clinical trial](#), curcumin supplements were as effective as the prescription drug Prozac for elevating mood in people with major depression, a condition linked to [brain inflammation](#) and [increased risk for heart problems](#).

Curcumin has powerful anti-inflammatory and anti-microbial properties. Another [recent clinical trial](#) reported that a 1% solution of curcumin (in water) worked nearly as well for killing oral bacte-

ria as a standard dental rinse (0.2% chlorhexidine gluconate) in people with periodontal (gum) disease. Gum disease, which affects about 50% of Americans aged 30 and older, was recently shown to be a contributing cause of arterial disease in a [landmark, peer-reviewed BaleDoneen study](#).

GARLIC

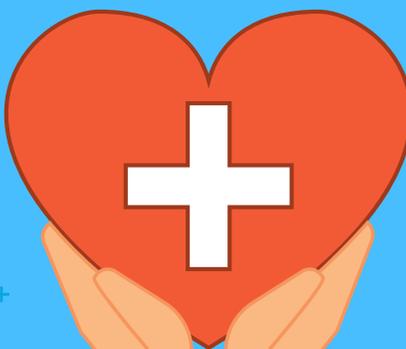
Lowers blood pressure and boosts heart health

For more than 2,000 years, physicians have prescribed garlic as a heart tonic — and recent studies have proven them right. There is strong scientific evidence that eating a half to one clove of garlic daily lowers total cholesterol levels by up to 9%, while taking aged garlic extract may reduce systolic blood pressure (the top number) by 5.5%, according to a [recent paper in Current Cardiology Reviews](#).

Garlic — a staple of the heart-healthy Mediterranean diet — has many other beneficial effects on arterial health, leading the paper's authors to conclude that the pungent plant is a powerful weapon against cardiovascular disease. The paper also reported that ginger, black pepper and coriander also have well-established CV benefits, as well as the power to "turn an ordinary meal into an extraordinary experience." Overall, adding spice to our life is a delicious way to maintain a healthy heart, the researchers concluded.

THE LIFESAVING IMPORTANCE OF GETTING DENTAL CARE

AT LEAST TWICE A YEAR



If you haven't seen your dental provider lately, you're missing out on key screenings and treatments that could help you avoid dangerous health threats, including heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, some forms of cancer and possibly even Alzheimer's disease. All of these disorders, and many others, have been linked to poor oral health in recent studies. Here's more motivation to schedule a dental checkup: Doing so could actually save your life. In a study of nearly 6,000 older adults, those who hadn't seen a dentist in the previous year had a 50% higher death rate than those who went two or more times annually. Here's how optimal dental hygiene and care promote wellness at every age.

A DANGEROUS HEART ATTACK RISK THAT AFFECTS NEARLY 65 MILLION AMERICANS

One in two adults aged 30 and older — 64.7 million Americans — have periodontal disease (PD), a chronic oral infection that can lead to tooth loss if untreated. PD often causes no symptoms in the early stages. Later symptoms include chronic bad breath, loose teeth, swollen, red or bleeding gums and changes in your bite. To find out if you have PD, ask your dental provider to do a painless exam, using a mirror and periodontal probe to check for signs of oral infection.

Here's why it's important to get checked for gum disease: A [2016 BaleDoneen study published in Postgraduate Medical Journal \(PMJ\)](#) was the first to identify high-risk oral bacteria from PD as a contributing

cause of cardiovascular disease (CVD), the leading killer of Americans. These bacteria often enter the bloodstream and inflame arterial plaque, leading to blood clots that can trigger heart attacks and strokes. In [a 2016 analysis of studies involving more than 7,000 people](#), those with infected gums were 2.5 times more likely to suffer heart attacks.

OPTIMIZING YOUR ORAL HEALTH CAN BE LIFESAVING

Other recent studies have linked PD and poor oral health to increased risk for these life-threatening conditions, offering compelling reasons to get regular dental care:

- **Alzheimer's disease.** In [a 2016 study](#), people with severe gum disease were 70% more likely to develop Alzheimer's disease, while [another 2016 study](#) found

that in people who already had the memory-robbing disorder, cognitive decline progressed six times faster in those with PD.

- **Breast cancer.** In [a study of nearly 74,000 women](#), those with PD had 14% higher risk for breast cancer. Among former or current smokers, breast cancer risk was 36% higher in those with PD. Any form of nicotine use is a major risk factor for developing gum disease, offering yet another reason to kick this deadly habit.

- **Pancreatic cancer.** In a recent study, people with high levels of antibodies to periodontal bacteria in their blood (an indication of systemic infection) were twice as likely to develop pancreatic cancer as those without these antibodies.

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• *January Recipe* •



Cinnamon-Spiced Moroccan Chicken

Ready in less than 30 minutes, this easy, flavorful North African recipe is sure to delight your family and friends. Zesty, heart-healthy spices provide some much appreciated heat during chilly weather, while the apples lower levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol and inflammation. Serve this savory dish with brown rice, couscous or quinoa. For a flavor variation, substitute raisins or dried apricots for the dates.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon, divided
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1/4 teaspoon chili powder
- 4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 cup whole dates, pitted and sliced
- 2 Granny Smith apples, peeled and chopped into small cubes
- 1/4 cup slivered almonds, toasted for garnish

Combine 1 teaspoon of the cinnamon with the cumin, turmeric and chili powder in a shallow dish or resealable plastic bag. Coat both sides of the chicken breasts with the spice mix. Heat the olive oil in a large, nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add chicken and sauté 5 minutes per side or until golden brown and cooked through. Remove the chicken from skillet and keep warm. Sauté dates and apples for 1 minute. Sprinkle with the remaining cinnamon, stir to coat, and cook 1 additional minute. Top the chicken with apples and dates. Garnish with toasted almonds and enjoy! Serves four

Adapted from MarthaStewart.com and McCormick.com.

• **Frailty.** A study of more than 1,200 older men found that those with poor oral health were twice as likely to develop signs of frailty, such as a weak grip, slow walking speed and exhaustion. Frailty raises risk for hospitalization, disability, physical and mental decline and a shorter lifespan.

A REVOLUTIONARY NEW APPROACH TO TREATING GUM DISEASE

The PMJ study could change how dental providers diagnose and manage

periodontal disease, since it's important to find out if people with PD have the high-risk bacteria now known to be a contributing cause of arterial disease. Instead of only evaluating the severity of a patient's symptoms — such as how deep the pockets of infection are, how much the gums bleed, or how loose the teeth are — the BaleDoneen Method recommends using available tests from companies that measure oral pathogens through DNA analysis, including OralDNA, OraVital and Hain Diagnostics.

Finding out if PD is due to high-risk bacteria is important for providing optimal care to protect oral-systemic health. Treatments for PD include non-surgical periodontal therapy, a daily program of oral care to follow at home, prescription mouthwashes, dental trays with antibacterial gel (PerioProtect), and in some cases, a short course of antibiotics. Regardless of which treatment is prescribed, the BaleDoneen Method recommends repeating the DNA testing to make sure the treatment was successful.