Spice Up Your Life! Bring Down Inflammation.

I hope your home is filled with the fragrance of cinnamon, pumpkin spice, and everything nice as we transition from one holiday to the next! Interesting how these smells can soothe your soul and set you at ease, washing away the stresses of the day- makes sense that they work wonders when we consume them too!

Heart disease, diabetes, cancer, gastrointestinal issues- what is a commonality between all of them? Inflammation in the body. "Think about a splinter in your finger or an abscess on a tooth," said Donna Arnett, Ph.D., chair and professor of epidemiology at the School of Public Health at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and a past president of the American Heart Association. "Our body launches an attack with our white blood cells and chemicals that results in redness and swelling to kill the bacteria or rid the body of the intruder." Injury to the body, whether it be by buildup of plaque in the arteries, chronically high blood sugars, or free radicals that occur from the foods we eat and the environment we live in can emit this type of response. There isn’t one food or one method to combat this- it’s a mix of healthy lifestyle choices to maintain our health throughout our lifetime.

Following a healthy diet, like the Mediterranean Diet, regular exercise, and stress management provide a good defense against several health issues. Plant-based foods and spices are particularly of interest when it comes to battling inflammation. Luckily these are easy ways to not only enhance the flavor of your meals, but your efforts to stay healthy as well. Here are a few to add year-round, and conveniently star in some of your holiday dishes!

- **Cinnamon** has been used for medicinal purposes for centuries, and today research is discovering more on why that is. Some evidence suggests cinnamon reduces inflammation, but the strongest evidence is related to its role in helping to control blood sugars in type 2 diabetics. Add cinnamon to sweet and savory dishes, from cereals to whole-grain salads.
- **Ginger**'s medicinal properties are truly versatile! You may know it best for its tummy-settling properties, but it also has been shown to protect tissues and organs from oxidative damage. Think: free radicals.
- **Turmeric** gives curry powder its distinct yellow color, and has been shown to inhibit the growth of a specific gene that may develop into breast cancer. This spice is mild in flavor and can be added to vegetable side dishes or rice for a splash of color and depth of flavor.
- We know blueberries are an antioxidant powerhouse, but did you know just ½ teaspoon of ground clove contains more antioxidants than ½ cup of blueberries?! Get out of town! Better yet, get in the kitchen and add it to dishes where you’d use cinnamon or ginger, such as oatmeal, muffins, or applesauce to name a few.

Source:
http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/Inflammation-and-Heart-Disease_UCM_432150_Article.jsp#.VkyYoLeFNkg
http://www.todaysdietitian.com/newarchives/030612p40.shtml