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## Spicy goodness at Christmas

Find out more about five Christmas spices, which are used in traditional Christmas items such as fruit cake and mulled wine. Each of them have health benefits that include boosting the immune system, alleviating nausea and relieving flatus.

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You know Christmas is coming when you smell certain spices in the air. For example, clove and cinnamon, which are used in mulled wine and fruit cake. Or ginger, which is used in gingerbread.

Not only do these spices deepen the flavour of festive goodies, but they also have some nutritional value. Cinnamon, for instance, may help to relieve indigestion.

Do note, however, that some of these findings arose from studies that used a larger quantity of spices than usual, said Ms Jaclyn Reutens, a dietitian with Aptima Nutrition and Sports Consultants.

So, the positive effects may not be perceptible as these spices are normally used in small amounts.

Nevertheless, think of it as a little health bonus as you bask in the wonderful aroma of Christmas.

### **NUTMEG**

Made from the seed of the nutmeg tree, it is often used in eggnog and mince pies. Nutmeg is high in potassium, a mineral that is said to be good for lowering blood pressure.

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Studies have shown that spices such as (above) nutmeg, star anise and cinnamon have health benefits. But, some of those merits may be evident only if the spices are used in larger-than-usual quantities.  
PHOTOS: CHRIS TAN, ST FILE PHOTO

### **CLOVE**

Made from the dried flower buds of the clove tree, it is used in mulled wine and fruit cakes. It is said to be good for intestinal health as it stimulates digestive enzymes, relieves the excess release of gas and alleviates nausea.

### **CINNAMON**

Made from the inner bark of evergreen trees that belong to the genus *Cinnamomum*, it is used to make mulled wine, fruit cake and stollen. It helps to alleviate nausea and indigestion. Some studies also show that it can help to lower blood sugar levels in people with diabetes.

### **STAR ANISE**

This is the seed pod from the fruit of an evergreen shrub known as *Illicium verum*. It can be used to spice up baked ham or roast chicken. It appears to boost the immune system and has anti-bacterial properties.

It was also found to have anti-fungal properties when tested against *Candida albicans*, a common fungus that can cause many infections, including those in the mouth, intestinal tract and vagina.

### **GINGER**

This is the underground stem of the ginger plant, and is used in gingerbread, festive cocktails and more. It can help reduce the incidence of nausea. It aids digestion by stimulating saliva flow, and boosts the immune system with its anti-inflammatory properties.

**Joyce Teo**