



# Herbal help this festive season

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**It's that time of year again when we are all trying to escape irritating sniffles, colds and flu. Luckily there is an abundance of wonderful herbs and spices you can use to boost your immunity and stay healthy throughout the festive season, and beyond.**

Did you know that many of the every day herbs that you have in your kitchen cupboard have anti-viral properties? They can be highly effective against a number of influenza strains and respiratory viruses, and should be on the top of your shopping list.

Ginger root is a powerful antiviral and antibacterial herb that can help reduce fevers and relieve colds and inflammation. It's best used freshly chopped with your hot food or in smoothies, or have it as a tea with half a lemon, and sweetened with a little Manuka honey or a pinch of cinnamon.

Another herb that's good to have in your kitchen all year round, is garlic. Always use it freshly chopped to boost your immunity and so help to avoid common colds taking hold. Licorice root, which can easily be bought from a herbalist as sticks, teas or as a powder, is a broad-spectrum anti-viral herb. It is thought to work through multiple mechanisms that prevent viral replication and growth, and that activate your immune cells. But take care: there is no need to take high dosages and don't use it at all for anyone who has high blood pressure. Licorice also enhances the immune-boosting ability of other herbs, such as echinacea.

The echinacea herb potently enhances your immune system's first line of defence. Your herbalist can combine it with Siberian Ginseng to build up your strength to fight

through immune challenges. Echinacea can also be very useful for deep-seated infections, so should be part of your herbal first aid kit.

Once temperatures drop, spice up your teas and foods with cinnamon, ginger, cardamom, cumin, nutmeg, black pepper and cayenne. These spices will heat your body from the core, and support circulation and digestion. They also help to improve absorption of nutrients at stressful times when your body is in need of a more dense nutrient supply.

But don't neglect the Mediterranean spices such as thyme, white sage, rosemary, basil and oregano! They have long been known for their antimicrobial properties and show a specific affinity to the lung tissues. Add garlic and rosemary to your apple cider vinegar, use it on your salad together with tahini and pumpkin seed oil, both of which are high in zinc, another nutrient needed for good immune function.

A 'decoction' made from thyme, sage and marshmallow root can be soothing to inflamed throats and its aromatic oils help to loosen congestion and aid better breathing.

When preparing your daily meals try to include seasonal foods as they carry specific phytonutrients depending on the time of the year. It's now a good time to increase your intake of autumn coloured berries and vegetables. The purple, blue, yellow and reds contain anthocyanins and flavonoids which are important health-promoting antioxidants. As a tip, stew organic Bramley apples and add some mixed berries, cloves, (another powerful anti-microbial spice), some almonds for protein and cinnamon quills to sweeten it all up!

Finally, and to prevent the spread of infections throughout your family home, safely burn some essential oils such as lavender, sage and frankincense. Add some orange blossom or cinnamon oil to make it even more effective, and it will surely add to the festive atmosphere of your home.

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