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Reviews: Current topics

The role of herbs and spices in cancer prevention

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Abstract

Historically, herbs and spices have enjoyed a rich tradition of use for their flavor enhancement characteristics and for their medicinal properties. The rising prevalence of chronic diseases worldwide and the corresponding rise in health care costs is propelling interest among researchers and the public for multiple health benefits related to these food items, including a reduction in cancer risk and modification of tumor behavior. A growing body of epidemiological and preclinical evidence points to culinary herbs and spices as minor dietary constituents with multiple anticancer characteristics. This review focuses on the antimicrobial, antioxidant, and antitumorigenic properties of herbs and spices; their ability to influence carcinogen bioactivation; and likely anticancer contributions. While culinary herbs and spices present intriguing possibilities for health promotion, more complete information is needed about the actual exposures to dietary components that are needed to bring about a response and the molecular target(s) for specific herbs and spices. Only after this information is obtained will it be possible to

specific herbs and spices. Only after this information is obtained will it be possible to define appropriate intervention strategies to achieve maximum benefits from herbs and spices without eliciting ill consequences.



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Keywords

Diet; Herbs; Spices; Cancer prevention

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