

## Health benefits of spices - a critique

Ranasinghe RLDS<sup>1</sup>, Ediriweera ERHSS<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Deshiya Chikitsa, Institute of Indigenous Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Nidana Chikitsa, Institute of Indigenous Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

### Abstract

Spices have been an integral part of our food for millennia. However, most potent and healthiest spices are rarely used due to lack of knowledge. Present study was undertaken to collect medicinal uses and health benefits of spices. Data were gathered from traditional Sri Lankan and Ayurvedic authentic texts and web sources. In the present study, 60 plant species belonging to 32 families were taken into consideration. Spices often come from the leaves, fruits, seeds, roots, bulbs or bark of the plants. Fruits (39%) are the most preferable part used as spices with leaves in second place (28%). According to Ayurveda, the dominant taste of the spices is *Katu Rasa* (pungent) (75%) followed by *Tikta Rasa* (bitter) (59%). The majority of spices (80%) have *Ushna Veerya* (hot in potency) and *Katu Vipaka* (71%) (pungent in end part of digestion). Most spices pacify *Kapha* and *Vata Dosha* but enhance *Pitta Dosha*. 50% and 30% of spices show, *Deepana* (enhancing digestive power) and *Ruchi Vardhana* (appetizing) properties respectively. Anti-inflammatory, antipyretic, anthelmintic, antibacterial and diuretic properties of some spices are scientifically proven. Spices are good sources of Vitamin C, A and K. Most abundant mineral in spices is potassium, which is an important component in controlling cardiac functions. Spices are also rich in manganese, a co-factor for the antioxidant enzyme, superoxide dismutase. Most spices are high in antioxidants with cinnamon being the highest. They comprise essential oils and carotenoids which enhance the flavour and add colour to dishes. Spices provide a way to add flavour to food without the extra fat, calories, sodium or cholesterol. They are used as popular home remedies for different ailments such as indigestion, diarrhea and vomiting. It is concluded that using spices improves digestion and protect the body against certain chronic conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, and heart diseases.

**Keywords:** Spices, Ayurveda, vitamins, antioxidants

**Corresponding E mail:** ayurvedadocsujatha@yahoo.com