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The Science Behind Holiday Spices: Nutmeg

One of the signature spices of the holiday season is nutmeg, and nothing says nutmeg more than eggnog. For me, it can end right there but in doing the background research, I found nutmeg is used in a variety of holiday dishes from cookies to main dishes to holiday-spiced lattes.

Nutmeg is a commonly used spice derived from the seed of the *Myristica fragrans* tree. A little nutmeg goes a long way, so it's used sparingly especially when grated fresh. Just like cloves, nutmeg is being researched for its health properties. In the past year, research studies have examined the benefits of nutmeg phytonutrients as an anti-coagulant, detoxifier, and as a cancer treatment (1-3). These are test-tube and animal studies, and the benefits for humans are years away from being tested. However when used in small quantities in the foods we eat, nutmeg may have benefits we don't expect.



But proceed with caution if you follow the typical approach: "If a little is good, more is better." There have been several case studies reporting nutmeg toxicity. Nutmeg has a potent effect on the nervous system and can cause hallucinations and memory loss (4). As long as you use the amounts typically used in cooking there appears to be no problem, so branch out and look for more ways to use nutmeg.

Saturday: cinnamon!

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

References:

1. J Med Food. 2016 Nov;19(11):1065-1073.
2. Adv Pharm Bull. 2016 Jun;6(2):271-4. doi: 10.15171/apb.2016.038.
3. Am J Chin Med. 2016;44(5):1063-79. doi: 10.1142/S0192415X16500592.
4. Neth J Med. 2015 Jan;73(1):46-8.

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