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WELLSPRING

THE HEALTH MAGAZINE FOR THE JEWISH FAMILY

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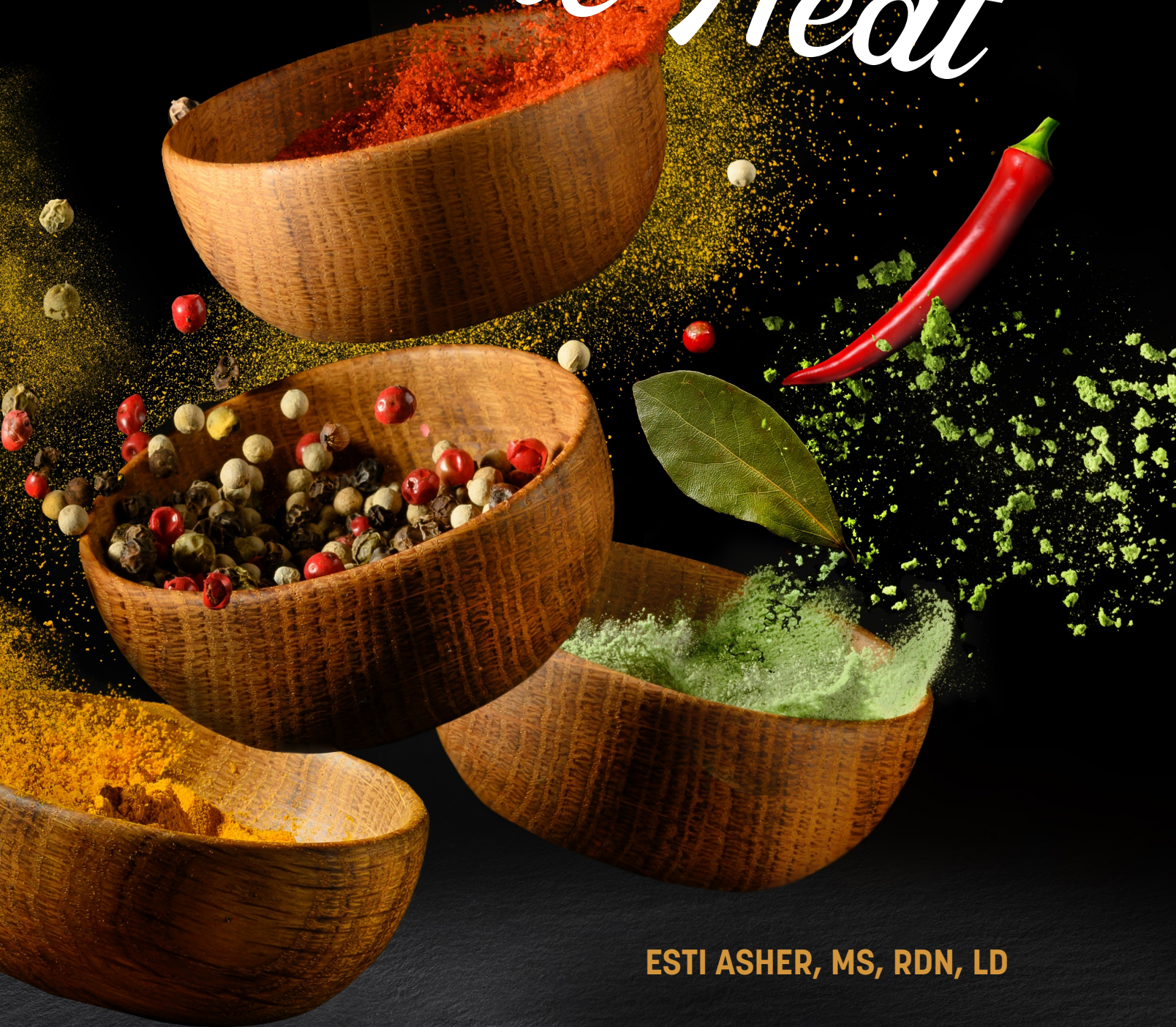
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Turn Up the Heat



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With summer approaching and temperatures rising, we're starting to feel the heat. On the subject of heat, let's talk about what causes some foods to be hot (i.e., spicy foods)—and their potential health benefits.

Below are 6 foods that are often used to spice up dishes, with some of their corresponding nutritional benefits.



Jalapeño Peppers

These peppers are particularly spicy and come in both a red and green variety. In addition to being a good source of fiber, vitamin B6, and vitamin C, the unique component responsible for their spicy profile is called capsaicin. Capsaicin is anti-inflammatory, which is beneficial for heart health, and has also been shown to increase metabolism and decrease appetite.



Garlic

Allicin is the name of the sulfur compound found within garlic (and onions) that is responsible for its spicy and potent flavor. This compound has antibacterial properties and has been used for its medicinal properties throughout history. Garlic is also particularly healthy because of its copper, selenium, manganese, and vitamins C and B6, and thiamine content.



Onion

Similar to garlic, onions are members of the allium genus (i.e., they also contain allicin). In addition, they are a good source of potassium, a mineral needed for fluid balance, nerve transmission, kidney function, and muscle contraction. Onions are also very high in antioxidants, as well as rich in gut-healthy fiber and prebiotics.



Black Pepper

This common and basic kitchen spice is rich in a compound called piperine. According to some studies, the piperine found in black pepper has antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. Animal studies have also shown piperine to improve brain function and potentially benefit conditions such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.



Ginger

The pungent compound within ginger is called gingerol (and is related to capsaicin and piperine). Gingerol has notable nutritional and health benefits that boast medicinal properties, such as alleviating nausea and relieving pain from arthritis and other conditions. Additional benefits include antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and antimicrobial properties.



Turmeric

While not necessarily considered hot, turmeric definitely has a strong and pungent flavor. Curcumin is the active ingredient within turmeric and is responsible for both the flavor and the beneficial properties. This has led to people buying turmeric supplements and/or adding turmeric to a variety of foods and drinks, including lattes. Nutritional benefits of curcumin include helping to manage oxidative and inflammatory conditions, arthritis, anxiety, metabolic syndrome, and hyperlipidemia. There are also studies that suggest it may help with recovery post-exercise, including reducing inflammation and muscle soreness.

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An Increase in Family Mealtime May Lead to Increase in Fruit and Vegetable Intake

While it may not be practical for all families all the time, there are many benefits to sitting down and eating a meal as a family—and the change of pace in summertime often allows for more of that to happen. Benefits include increased family bonding, decreased stress and tension in the home environment, and modeling healthy eating habits, among others.

New research published in *JAMA Network* adds another potential benefit of family meals, and specifically when they are extended by a mere ten minutes.

A randomized clinical trial took place in Berlin, Germany with 50 parent-child pairs, in which the parent was most often the mother, and the child was aged 6–11 years old. The two conditions tested were a standard family mealtime and then a family mealtime extended by 50 percent (10 minutes longer on average). The significant finding was the increased number of pieces of fruit and vegetables eaten by the child during a meal. In addition, children reported higher satiety levels, and a lower eating rate (defined as bites per minute) was observed during the mealtimes with longer duration.

Healthier Diet Correlated with Increased Physical Fitness

The *European Journal of Preventative Cardiology* published a study suggesting that a healthier diet is connected to an increased level of physical fitness, more specifically, cardiorespiratory fitness. This measurement displays the body's ability to provide and utilize oxygen for exercise and involves different organ systems, including the lungs, heart, blood vessels, and muscles.

Researchers evaluated the diet of 2,380 participants in the Framingham Heart Study using the Harvard semi-quantitative food frequency questionnaire, as well as undergoing a maximum effort cardiopulmonary exercise test, which is a gold standard assessment of fitness and specifies the amount of oxygen used during high-intensity exercise.

Ultimately, participants with higher diet scores (indicating diets with an emphasis on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and healthy fats, while limiting alcohol and red meat) reported increased fitness levels. Since a healthy dose of consideration for health generally presents in better food choices, as well as more attention to physical activity, these findings are not that surprising. ♥