



FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW BURTON, PORTRAIT BY VERONIKA MARX



**t** V CHEF, PRESENTER, author and mum of four, Tonia Buxton is living proof that a healthy diet and plenty of exercise can help the constant ‘juggle’. She says, “Life can be overwhelming; we are all too busy, too tired or too stressed, often wishing we could lose that stubborn half a stone or get that extra hour’s sleep at night. We’re desperate for food that is easy and quick to make but tastes delicious.”

Tonia champions the use of spice as part of the solution. “A pinch of the right spice will alter the way you look and feel for the better.” Her latest book, *The Secret of Spice* (Lagom, £20) is full of insight and advice on using the right herbs for our health and wellbeing – and beauty treatments too. Stress, especially headaches brought about by tension, are just one area she believes can be vastly improved with a dash of spice. ►





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Managing stress allows us to be the person we want to be, and not the monster it turns us into

## STRESS AND MIGRAINE

PUT YOUR FEET up and let's talk a little about headspace. For years, people have associated stress with ill health, and there's an abundance of evidence to back this up. Everything from heart disease to cancer has been linked with stressful lifestyles and high levels of stress hormones.

Recent evidence suggests that our negative perception of stress can be more harmful than the stress itself. Technically this should be good news, as it means that if we see stressors as challenges, we can avoid the harmful effects of feeling stressed out. Of course, this is easier said than done, and if our bodies are not equipped with the right substances to allow the body to remove the stress hormones and increase the feel-good hormones, we will have less chance of success. When our heads aren't clear, we often make poor choices, and this includes food choices. This is why it is essential that we give our bodies the best chance of defeating stress by fortifying it with nutrients that are known to do so. Furthermore, migraine headaches are one of the most common side effects of chronic stress and have even been known to start instantly in extreme situations. The herbs and spices used to reduce stress will make the body more resilient to migraines and aid general pain management.

## ESSENTIAL VITAMINS AND MINERALS

**VITAMIN A** can help the body in its battle with stress, due to its antioxidant abilities. Foods rich in vitamin A include carrots, sweet potatoes, winter squash, apricots, spinach and kale.

**B-COMPLEX** vitamins have various benefits for those suffering with stress, and have often been called the 'anti-stress vitamins'. Vitamin B1 is important for the body's ability to deal with stress.

**VITAMIN B5** is essential for the production of several stress hormones and facilitates a healthy stress response. Serotonin production and noradrenaline production are linked with high levels of the vitamin B6. Vitamins B2 and B12 have been known to reduce the frequency of migraines and vitamin B12 may also combat the emotional effects of stress. As a natural mood enhancer, it has been known to reduce levels of anxiety. Rich sources of B vitamins include poultry, fish and nuts.

**VITAMIN C** can help reduce stress by raising progesterone and lowering cortisol and corticosterone. Furthermore, as an antioxidant, vitamin C helps protect the cells from the harmful effects of stress. Vitamin C is also essential for the healthy functioning of the immune system, which can be hindered by stress. Low levels of vitamin C are associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression, which both lead to stress.



**MAGNESIUM** is important for the regulation of the stress response. Low levels of magnesium have been known to lead to irritability and anxiety as well as to a predisposition to stress. Magnesium deficiency has also been linked with migraines. This may be due to several factors, as magnesium contributes to healthy blood pressure, blood sugar and also to the functioning of the nervous system. Magnesium has been known to play a part in relaxation. It can be found in dark chocolate, avocado, nuts, legumes, tofu, seeds, salmon, mackerel and bananas.

**ZINC** is important for healthy adrenal activity. It is essential for fighting the negative effects of stress. Rich sources of zinc include red meat, shellfish, seeds, cashews, pine nuts, almonds, dairy, dark chocolate and wholegrains.

## CARDAMOM (*Elettaria cardamomum*)

THIS SPICE IS LOADED WITH HEALTH BENEFITS AND IS KNOWN AS THE 'AROMATIC SPICE'

### HOLISTIC BENEFITS

STUDIES HAVE IDENTIFIED the consumption of cardamom as a way of preventing cardiovascular disease. The micronutrients in it are believed to reduce the abundance of fats in the body and help control regular heartbeat. The reduction of these harmful fats can also stimulate metabolism and aid weight loss. Cardamom has also been shown to reduce harmful cholesterol in the blood. In addition, there is evidence that the manganese in it can regulate blood sugar levels, which may assist in the prevention and management of Type 2 diabetes and may also assist with weight loss.



## HEALTH



The high levels of iron in cardamom make it exceptional for reducing the risk of anaemia and may help to reduce fatigue and assist in restful sleep. Regularly used in aromatherapy, cardamom is believed to be a natural antidepressant. When consumed as a tea, it is thought to cleanse both the body and the mind.

The manganese found in cardamom may help lessen the risk of migraines by removing harmful toxins from the body. Cardamom is a natural detoxifier and may also help to reduce the visible signs of ageing, such as wrinkles and dark circles under the eyes.

### NUTRITIONAL VALUE

CARDAMOM IS A fantastic source of iron and manganese. It also contains vitamin C and fibre, and magnesium, potassium, calcium and zinc.

## THYME (*Thymus vulgaris*)

THIS AROMATIC HERB HAS CULINARY AND ORNAMENTAL USES, BUT IT ALSO HAS MANY HEALTH BENEFITS INCLUDING HELPING BRONCHITIS, ARTHRITIS AND SORE THROATS

### HOLISTIC BENEFITS

A NUMBER OF medications, from chest rubs and cold medications to acne medication and cough syrups, contain thyme, and it is also popular in toothpastes and mouthwashes because of its numerous health benefits.

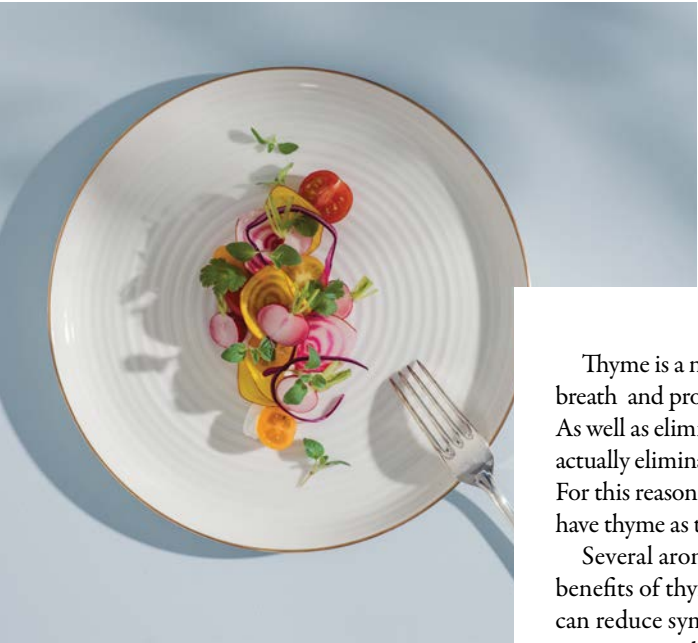
There is evidence that thyme is a great treatment for respiratory disorders and is an effective medicine for bronchitis, colds, flu and asthma, as well as a treatment for seasonal allergies. Vitamin C is present in thyme, so the immune system is also enhanced by this herb.

With its high amount of phenolic antioxidants and nutrients, thyme is great for those trying to protect their heart health and their health in general. It can also reduce bad cholesterol in the blood and increase beneficial cholesterol in the blood, further decreasing the risk of heart disease.

The herb will increase the density and strength of the bones, as well as reducing the risk of degenerative bone disorders and bone diseases such as osteoporosis. ►







Thyme is a natural remedy for bad breath and promotes good oral health. As well as eliminating the odour, thyme actually eliminates the bacteria that cause it. For this reason, several antiseptic mouthwashes have thyme as their active ingredient.

Several aromatherapies recognise the benefits of thyme on mood. This herb can reduce symptoms of depression and insomnia, and there are even reports suggesting that it can aid restful sleep by eliminating nightmares.

Thyme is thought to be one of the best antibacterial herbs, surpassing the effectiveness of the powerhouse spices, cinnamon and clove. This makes it a natural preserver of foods and it can protect against food-borne illnesses.



OREGANO

(*Origanum vulgare*)

THIS HERB IS GREAT IN SALAD OR ON A PIZZA BUT IT ALSO HAS MANY MEDICINAL USES, INCLUDING BEING GREAT FOR YOUR SKIN

HOLISTIC BENEFITS

OREGANO IS AN ingredient that can actually aid healthy digestion so that you feel fuller for longer, while enhancing the digestive system’s efficiency. It can improve blood circulation and reduce harmful cholesterol, which decreases the risk of heart attack, stroke and atherosclerosis. The potassium in oregano makes it great for maintaining a healthy blood pressure.

This Mediterranean wonder herb can also prevent anaemia due to its high iron content, which is essential for the production of haemoglobin. It also helps reduce fatigue and aids the maintenance of healthy energy levels, as it sends oxygen to your cells and muscles, increasing strength.

The anti-inflammatory properties of oregano have identified the herb as a natural pain reliever.

Body aches, toothache, muscle spasms and sinus headaches are among the ailments thought to be helped by its consumption.

Menstrual cramps and discomfort caused by menstruation and the menopause have also been reduced by oregano consumption. Not only can oregano reduce the intensity of these pains but there is evidence that it may also assist in the regulation of a healthy menstrual cycle, and some studies even suggest that it can aid in the prevention of premature menopause.

The large amounts of vitamin K, calcium, manganese and iron in oregano make it fantastic for bone health. Oregano provides an astounding amount of your daily vitamin K, which not only helps to keep your bones strong but also assists in the prevention of bone disorders, including osteoporosis.

Oregano can help in healthy ageing by keeping your skin and hair strong and healthy. As a great antioxidant, oregano can protect cells from premature death and oxidative damage, which can lead to premature ageing. There is also evidence that the nutrients in oregano aid in the prevention of age-related mental decline and enhance brain activity, protecting the brain from conditions, such as Alzheimer’s disease and dementia. This makes it an aid to healthy ageing. Millions of people in the Mediterranean who enjoy both oregano and long, healthy lives can’t be wrong, can they?

NUTRITIONAL VALUE

OREGANO IS RICH in calcium, iron, manganese and vitamin K. It also contains vitamins A and E and several of the B-complex vitamins including B1, B2, B3 and B5 as well as magnesium and potassium.



MARJORAM

(*Oreganum marjorana*)

THIS HERB IS ALSO KNOWN AS THE HAPPY HERB, AND IS COMMONLY USED TO TREAT COUGHS AND COLDS

HOLISTIC BENEFITS

MARJORAM CONTAINS CARVACROL, which is antifungal, antiviral and antiseptic, and can inhibit the growth of many bacteria. It can also improve blood circulation and prevent anaemia due to its high iron content.

Marjoram can aid digestion by increasing appetite and reducing intestinal problems, such as cramps, constipation, diarrhoea and even intestinal infections. It has been linked with reducing and preventing symptoms of cold and flu, particularly in marjoram tea, and can also help in the treatment of asthma.

A natural anti-inflammatory, marjoram has been linked with pain relief and is also known to reduce body aches, toothache, muscle spasms and sinus headaches. Relief of anxiety, depression and stress have all been associated with marjoram.

The vitamins and minerals in marjoram helps with the prevention and treatment of Alzheimer’s, dementia and nerve damage. It also promotes the maintenance of a healthy heart rate and blood pressure, while enhancing brain activity.

The vitamin K in marjoram provides an astounding amount of your daily recommendation, which helps to keep your bones strong and aids in the prevention of bone disorders including osteoporosis.

Like oregano, marjoram keeps you young by keeping your skin and hair strong and healthy. A great antioxidant, it will also help the transportation of oxygen, giving you higher energy levels.

NUTRITIONAL VALUE

MARJORAM IS A rich source of vitamins K, A, C and B6 as well as calcium, iron, magnesium, copper, zinc and manganese. ■



RECIPES TO REDUCE STRESS



ORANGE, CARDAMOM AND ALMOND CAKE

WHEN I BAKE this cake, the kitchen fills with the warming smell of cardamom. I serve it on its own or with Greek yogurt that I have mixed with icing sugar and rosewater to make it even more aromatic.

SERVES 12

Ingredients:

- Zest and juice of 2 large oranges
- 250g dried pitted dates, chopped
- 200g butter, softened
- 150g light muscovado sugar
- 4 medium eggs
- 250g spelt flour
- 1tsp baking powder
- Seeds from 10 cardamom pods, crushed
- 100g ground almonds
- 50g pistachio nuts, bashed
- A pinch of salt
- 1 small orange, finely sliced, to decorate
- 4tbsp icing sugar

METHOD:

1. Preheat the oven to 140°C/275°F/Gas Mark 1. Line the base of a 21cm loose-bottomed cake tin with baking paper.
2. Set aside 2tbsp of the orange juice and a little zest. Heat the rest in a saucepan with the dates for 3 minutes. Remove from the heat and allow to cool.
3. Using an electric whisk, beat the butter and sugar together in a bowl for 3 minutes until pale and creamy. Beat in the eggs one at a time, adding 1tbsp of the flour to stop it curdling. Fold in the remaining flour, the baking powder, cardamom seeds, ground almonds, pistachios and a pinch of salt.
4. Stir in the cooled dates and juice mixture, then spoon into the tin. Level the surface and decoratively lay the orange slices on the surface of the cake mixture. Bake for 1 hour 50 minutes to 2 hours or until a knife inserted into the centre comes out clean. Cover with foil if the top of the cake is browning too much during cooking. Allow to cool in the tin for 30 minutes, then remove and cool on a wire rack.
5. When the cake has cooled completely, mix the reserved orange juice and zest and the icing sugar together to make an icing. Drizzle over the cake and serve.

For more recipes like these see *The Secret of Spice* by Tonia Buxton (*Lagom*, £20)

“A natural anti-inflammatory, marjoram has been linked with pain relief and is also known to reduce body aches