

Healing foods of the Caribbean!

Studies that rank the happiness of countries around the globe show that folks living in the Caribbean are among the most upbeat and relaxed of all. And while it doesn't hurt to live in a tropical paradise with warm sand and soft breezes, the secret to their mellowness may lie in the local cuisine, which is chock-full of delicious foods, spices and drinks proven to be mood-lifters! Want to reap the same happy outlook without having to hop on a flight? Just revamp your menu to include ...



Aloe vera prevents tummy troubles!

You probably know that aloe gel is great for easing the sting of a sunburn. But did you know that Jamaicans drink its juice to prevent digestive problems, including constipation, and that scientific evidence proves it works? It's true: "Aloe's fiber composition soothes and detoxifies the intestines," says ethnobotanist Chris Kilham, author of *Hot Plants*. His advice: Sip 2 oz. to 4 oz. a day of a pure aloe juice, like Lily of the Desert Aloe Vera Gel (\$14.81 at VitaminShoppe.com). Mix it in fruit juice or sip it straight. "It has a mild, pleasant taste," Kilham says. **Important:** Talk to your doctor before using this or any other natural remedy. People who are allergic to garlic or onions may have allergic reactions to aloe.

Photos: dk and dennie cody/Masterfile; Ottmar Diez/Getty Images; Roulier/Pardo/photocuisine/Corbis; Emotive Images/Photolibary; Dinodia Photolibary/Stockfood Munich/Stockfood America; Annette Falck/Jumpfoto; Media Bakery; Zogbaum/Stockfood Munich/Stockfood America.

Passionflower tea is a natural tranquilizer!

Next time you're feeling frazzled, sip a cup or two of passionflower tea. This tropical treatment for anxiety and insomnia contains flavonoids, oils and other compounds that relax blood vessels, improving circulation and inducing calm, scientists say. In fact, a study found that these compounds act just like Valium, only without any negative side effects! Widely available in grocery stores, "there are few more effective, faster-acting things you can use to reduce anxiety," confirms Kilham.



Pineapple helps you heal faster!

Studies show that bromelain, the main enzyme in pineapple, speeds the healing of bruising, sprains and strains, says Kilham. It can also cut the severity of colds by reducing mucus and congestion, an effect that's almost immediate! "The enzymes just latch onto congestion and speed it out of the system fast," he says. To maximize the benefit, drink pineapple juice, which is even faster-acting than the fruit.



Did you know?

Though most of us associate pineapples with Hawaii, they were first cultivated in the Caribbean by the Carib Indians, for whom the islands are named!

Mango keeps skin young!

With its luscious aroma, it's not surprising that mango turns up in many tropical beauty products—but the reasons for its inclusion don't stop there: The fruit is packed with vitamins, minerals and antioxidants—especially beta-carotene—that nourish and plump skin cells. Eating as little as 2 cups of sliced mango a week is proven to reduce the aging effects of sunlight, says Elizabeth Somer, M.A., R.D., author of *Eat Your Way to Happiness*.



Ginger zaps sore throats and colds!

Islanders rely on ginger to flavor classic dishes like jerk chicken. They also "prescribe" it for protection against infections, with good reason: Ginger's ability to quash viruses has been confirmed in studies! Next time you feel a cold coming on, brew a pot of ginger tea, suggests Kilham. "It also has anti-inflammatory compounds that soothe a sore throat instantly, while simultaneously attacking the viruses causing it—so it often knocks a cold right out," he says.



—Barbara Hustedt Crook



Bananas are a good-mood food!

Having a so-so day? Eat a banana! Apart from being high in potassium—which helps keep blood pressure in check and control headaches—bananas are rich in tryptophan, an amino acid that your brain converts into the "happiness" hormone serotonin. "Most antidepressant drugs work by helping to maintain an adequate level of serotonin—something bananas do naturally," confirms Kilham.



Papaya eases pain!

High in vitamins C and A and potassium, papaya is best known for the enzyme papain, proven to reduce swelling and relieve the pain of inflammatory conditions, such as arthritis, tendonitis and backaches. It also helps the body break down protein, which is why it's often served in the islands at the end of meals! To get both benefits, help yourself to the fruit or juice (it tastes something like a combination of pineapple and peach) or take a papain-based supplement like the Chewable Original Papaya Enzyme at Swanson Vitamins.com (\$9.49 for 250 50-mg. tablets).