Oregano, a cancer fighting 'super spice'

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Oregano, a seasoning commonly used in pizza and other Italian food, has the potential to become a powerful weapon against prostate cancer, scientists have found.

A medicine inspired by it could have fewer side-effects than existing treatments, which can cause problems from incontinence to impotence.

Researchers from Long Island University, New York, studied carvacrol, a chemical in oregano. Added to prostate cancer cells in the lab, it rapidly wiped them out.

Left for four days, almost all the cells were killed, the Experimental Biology conference in San Diego heard. Tests showed it triggered the cells to kill themselves.

The oregano chemical could now be used itself as a treatment against cancer, or as the blueprint for an even more powerful drug.

Experts warned, though, that when oregano is eaten, it could be that carvacrol is digested before it can do any good.

Researcher Supriya Bavadekar, a pharmacologist, said: "If the study continues to yield positive results, this super-spice may present a very promising therapy for patients with prostate cancer."