



What Are Spices ?

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Talking about Indian food one of the first reactions one has is "Spicy Food". Imploring further for almost 90% of us it is the heat in the food. Sure enough Indian food is spicy but equally true is the fact that spice does not merely mean heat. On the contrary hotness is only one of the spices that generally comes from Pepper, Chilies, Cayenne etc. The definition of spice is much broader .

Definition of Spice

A pungent, aromatic substance, naturally occurring or derived from plants such as cinnamon, cloves, mustard, nutmeg, turmeric etc. used to flavor foods or beverages.



Some commonly used Indian

Spices can come from almost any part of a plant including seeds, leaves, barks, rhizomes, latex, stigmas, floral buds and modified stems. Some of the spices are even extracted from Rocks etc.

There is a long list of spices that are used for cooking by different cuisines. To go into detail about each would be difficult. However for the topic of discussion I will restrict myself to some spices that we at **Paradise India** use a lot

In next few articles I will publish important updates on the various spices. Sure enough the journey will also uncover a lot of mysteries as to how spices are beneficial to our body.

Cinnamon

One of the most common spices which we invariably use in all of our dishes is

Cinnamon.

Eating Navrattan Korma or Goat Curry or even Basmati rice some of you would have spotted a curled piece of stick much resembling to something shown in the picture. If not yet don't be

surprised next time. It is Cinnamon.

At Paradise India we use Ceylon Cinnamon in almost every dish that we make. In Chai tea we use it in powdered form



Benefits of Cinnamon



I know this article is going to get long. So before I dwell into much detail on the spice itself let me first list down some of the benefits of Cinnamon.

Apart from being an excellent flavoring agent, Cinnamon in its natural form is perhaps the richest spices in its medicinal benefits. Some of its various benefits include

- **Diabetes Control**
- **Anti-Microbial**
- **Anti Clogging**
- **Anti Cancerous**
- **Reduces Bad Cholesterol**
- **Brain Stimulant**
- **Antidote**
- **Prevents Tooth decay**
- **Cures Respiratory Probs.**
- **Fight Infections**
- **Ease menstruation cycles**
- **Helps Birth Control**
- **Breastfeeding**
- **Reduces Arthritis Pain**
- **Digestive Tonic**
- **Reduces UTI**
- **Headache & migraine cure**
- **Cure for Pimples & Blackheads**
- **Toning of tissues**
- **Muscle & joint pain relief**
- **Builds Immune System**
- **Healing open wounds and small cuts**
- **Prevents Itching**

History

“it was so highly treasured that it was considered more precious than gold”

Cinnamon is perhaps one of the world's oldest known spices. Its medicinal benefits have been known to Indian & Chinese for thousands of years. In [Ayurveda](#) (ancient Indian philosophy of medicine) cinnamon is used as a remedy for diabetes, indigestion, and colds. In traditional Chinese medicine, Cassia cinnamon is used for colds, flatulence, nausea,

diarrhea, and painful menstrual periods. It's also believed to improve energy, vitality, and circulation. It is particularly useful for people who tend to feel hot in their upper body but have cold feet. References of Cinnamon can be found in Bible too. Looking in Egyptian chronicles surprisingly Cinnamon was used as an embalming agent in ancient

Egypt. At one point in time it was so highly treasured that it was considered more precious than gold. It became one of the most relied upon spices in Medieval Europe & perhaps one of the first commodities traded regularly between the Near East and Europe.



Cinnamon Tree

Source and Origin

Latin names for Cinnamon is: *Cinnamomum zeylanicum*, *Cinnamomum cassia*

Cinnamon comes from the inner bark of the shoots of tree. The tree generally grows in tropical environment. To prepare Cinnamon, the bark of the tree is dried and rolled

into cinnamon sticks, also called quills. Cinnamon can also be dried and ground into a powder. The characteristic flavor and aroma of cinnamon comes from a compound in the essential oil of the bark called cinnamonaldehyde. Around 16th century spices were considered wealth.

Columbus, Magellan, and Vasco de Gama were all searching for spice routes and supplies. In 1505 the Portuguese discovered Ceylon (Sri Lanka) as an important producer of Cinnamon.

Varieties

Based on the place grown there are hundreds of varieties of Cinnamon. Generally speaking 5 varieties of Cinnamon are more common. These too can broadly be classified into two varieties.

Ceylon cinnamon

It is produced in Sri Lanka and India. Ceylon cinnamon is sometimes called true cinnamon. It is more

expensive and has a sweet taste. The quills are softer and can be easily ground in a coffee grinder. Ceylon cinnamon is sold in specialty stores.

Cassia cinnamon: Most cinnamon sold in supermarkets in North America comes from the less expensive variety, Cassia

cinnamon. It has a darker color and the quills are harder. Unlike Ceylon cinnamon, it can't be easily ground into a powder using a coffee grinder

It is mainly produced in **China** "Tung Hing Cassia", **Vietnam** "Saigon cassia" and **Indonesia** "Korintje cassia" & "Madagascar Cinnamon".

Health Benefits

Diabetes Control

Mounting evidence shows Cinnamon as one of the most beneficial spices. **Recent researches have shown it has insulin like qualities.** One of the first human studies was published in 2003 in a medical journal called *Diabetes Care*. Sixty people with type 2 diabetes took 1, 3, or 6 grams of cinnamon in pill form daily, an amount roughly equivalent to one quarter of a teaspoon to 1 teaspoon of cinnamon. After 40 days, all 3 amounts of cinnamon reduced fasting blood glucose by 18 to 29%, triglycerides by 23 to 30%, LDL cholesterol by 7 to 27%, and total cholesterol by 12 to 26%.

Cinnamon has shown to block the formation of these AGE compounds. The blocking quality comes from presence of antioxidants called **Phenols**. Cinnamon has phenol levels that are 18 percent of dry weight. For comparison, blueberries – which are widely touted for their antioxidant capabilities – contain roughly five percent phenol by dry weight. As per Journal of Medicinal Food, June 2008, "**Cinnamon has 50 to 100 times more antioxidant power per unit weight than fresh berries**".

In an ongoing in-vitro or test tube research conducted by Richard Anderson (a researcher with the U.S.D.A.) it was found that even 1/4 teaspoon of cinnamon a day can help lower the risk of the constellation of factors associated with metabolic syndrome like high blood cholesterol, triglyceride and glucose levels etc. by as much as 10 to 30 percent.

The latest research on cinnamon shows that by enhancing insulin signaling, cinnamon can prevent insulin resistance even in animals fed a high-fructose diet! A study published in the February 2004 issue of Hormone Metabolism Research showed that when rats fed a high-fructose diet were also given cinnamon extract, their ability to respond to and utilize glucose (blood sugar) was improved so much that it was the same as that of rats on a normal (control) diet.

For more information about cinnamon and diabetes, read [Is Cinnamon a Proven Diabetes Remedy?](#)

Note:- People taking diabetes medication or any medication that affects blood glucose or insulin levels shouldn't take therapeutic doses of cinnamon unless they're under a doctor's supervision. Taking them together may have an additive effect and cause blood glucose levels to dip too low. Also, people who have been prescribed medication to manage their blood sugar should not reduce or discontinue their dose and take cinnamon instead, especially without speaking with a doctor.

Why is high sugar harmful

When sugar is not broken down properly in the body sugar molecules attach to the proteins molecules to form AGE (advanced glycation end) products. These AGE's are responsible for tissue damage and inflammation including clogging of the arteries.

Health Benefits Contd..

Anti-Microbial

Cinnamon is anti-microbial and can stop the growth of bacteria, fungi and yeast. Preliminary lab and animal studies have found that cinnamon may have antibacterial and antifungal properties. It's active against *Candida albicans*, the fungus that causes yeast infections and thrush, and *Helicobacter pylori*, the bacteria responsible for stomach ulcers.

A study in the August 2003 International Journal of Food Microbiology found that a few drops of cinnamon essential oil added to carrot broth not only preserved it but also improved the flavor of the broth.

Brain Stimulant

Some studies have found that merely smelling the spice can increase alertness and brain function. A study from Wheeling Jesuit University in West Virginia showed that the mere scent of Cinnamon increased alertness and decreased frustration while driving. Reportedly one study found cinnamon improved scores on tasks such as memory, recognition, visual-motor speed and coordination, and attention. In another research led by Dr. P. Zoladz and presented April 24, 2004, at the annual meeting of the Association for Chemoreception Sciences, in Sarasota, FL, found that chewing cinnamon flavored gum or just smelling cinnamon enhanced study participants' cognitive processing. Specifically, cinnamon improved participants' scores on tasks related to attention processes, virtual recognition memory, working memory, and visual-motor speed while working on a computer-based

Anti Cancerous

Cinnamon has medicinal compounds including eugenol, which is used to relieve pain & cinnamaldehyde which has sedative properties. In a study published by researchers at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Maryland, cinnamon reduced the proliferation of leukemia & lymphoma cancer cells. Cinnamon is an excellent source of the trace mineral manganese & a very good source of dietary fiber, iron & calcium. The combination of calcium & fiber in cinnamon is important & can be helpful for the prevention of several different conditions. Both calcium & fiber can bind to bile salts and help remove them from the body. By removing bile, fiber helps to prevent the damage that certain bile salts can cause to colon cells, thereby reducing the risk of colon cancer.

Cholesterol reducer

When bile is removed by fiber, the body must break down cholesterol in order to make new bile. This process can help to lower high cholesterol levels, which can be helpful in preventing atherosclerosis and heart disease.

Antioxidant

Cinnamon is a powerful antioxidant. A study in the Journal of Nutrition found that out of all spices, cinnamon is one of the richest sources of disease-fighting antioxidants.

Infections

Due to its antifungal, antibacterial, antiviral, anti-parasitic and antiseptic properties, it is effective on external as well as internal infections. Cinnamon has been found to be effective in fighting vaginal yeast infections, oral yeast infections, stomach ulcers and head lice.

Tooth decay and mouth freshener

Cinnamon has traditionally been used to treat toothache and fight bad breath. Small pieces of cinnamon can be chewed, or gargled with cinnamon water which serves as a good mouth freshener.

Eases menstruation cycles

Cinnamon has also been found useful for women's health as it helps in providing relief from menstrual cramping and other feminine discomforts.

Anti Clogging

Cinnamon has anti-clotting and anti-inflammatory properties, which reduce clumping of blood platelets. The cinnaldehyde in cinnamon helps prevent unwanted clumping of blood platelets. (The way it accomplishes this health-protective act is by inhibiting the release of an inflammatory fatty acid called arachidonic acid from platelet membranes and reducing the formation of an inflammatory messaging molecule called thromboxane A2.)

Health Benefits Contd.

Antidote

Cinnamon is often used as an antidote for diarrhea and stomach upset as well as a metabolism booster. For sufferers of irritable bowel syndrome, the fiber in cinnamon may also provide relief from constipation or diarrhea.

Birth Control

Cinnamon also helps in natural birth control. Regular consumption of cinnamon after child birth delays menstruation and thus helps in avoiding conception.

Reduces Urinary tract infections

People who eat cinnamon on a regular basis report a lower incidence of urinary tract infections. Cinnamon is diuretic in nature and helps in secretion and discharge of urine.

Headaches and migraine

Headache due to the exposure to cold wind is readily cured by applying a thin paste of powdered cinnamon mixed in water on the temples & forehead.



Pimples and Blackheads

Cinnamon helps in removing blood impurities. Therefore it is often recommended for pimples. External application of paste of cinnamon powder with a few drops of fresh lemon juice over pimples & black heads would give beneficial result.

Digestive Tonic

Cinnamon is very effective for indigestion, nausea, vomiting, upset stomach, diarrhea and flatulence. It is very helpful in removing gas from the stomach and intestines. It also removes acidity, diarrhea and morning sickness. It is often referred to as a digestive tonic.

Reduces Arthritis Pain

Cinnamon spice contains anti-inflammatory compounds which can be useful in reducing pain and inflammation associated with arthritis.

A study conducted at Copenhagen University, where patients were given half a teaspoon of cinnamon powder combined with one tablespoon of honey every morning had significant relief in arthritis pain after one week and could walk without

Healing

Cinnamon helps in stopping bleeding. Therefore it facilitates the healing process.

Itching

Paste of honey and cinnamon is often used to treat insect bites.

Breastfeeding

It is also believed that cinnamon aids in the secretion of breast milk.

Muscle and joint pain relief

Those who eat cinnamon on a regular basis often report that their muscle and joint pain, as well as stiffness, is reduced or even eliminated.

Immune System

Honey and cinnamon paste is good for boosting the immune system, removing regular fatigue and increasing the longevity of an individual. It is also known to have **anti-aging properties.**

Toning of tissues

Considerable anecdotal evidence exists to suggest that cinnamon may have the ability to tone and constrict tissues in the body.

Cures Respiratory Problems

Cinnamon is very useful home remedy for common or severe colds. A person suffering should take one tablespoon of honey with 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon powder daily for 3 days. This process will cure most chronic cough, cold and clear the sinuses. Cinnamon also found to cure flu, influenza, sore throat and congestion.

“It is also known to have anti-aging properties.”

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