



Cinnamon – The Humble Superfood

Who would have thought that the humble unassuming cinnamon would acquire the status of Superfood in the modern day. A pinch of this flavourful spice can transform a dish from ordinary to extraordinary!!

Origin of Cinnamon

True Cinnamon (Ceylon cinnamon) and Cassia (Chinese cinnamon), are both derived from the bark of an evergreen tree. The difference between them is that Cassia has a more robust flavour and either can be substituted for the other. The characteristic rich, warm and sweet fragrance makes it one of the most evocative of spices and a much used ingredient in many cuisines worldwide.

Cultivation and Processing

The Cinnamon tree is an evergreen which can grow up to 7m (56 ft) in its natural state although trees in cultivated plantations are more often grown as bushes, no taller than 3 m (10 ft), as the stems are continually cut back to produce new stems for bark. It thrives best in a hot, wet tropical climate at low altitude and is usually ready to harvest after 3 years.

The plant is harvested during the wet season because the rains facilitate the peeling of the bark. Harvesting involves the removal of the stems then after 24 hours drying, the outer bark and inner lining are scraped off. The naturally curled pieces of peeled bark (quills) are placed one inside the other to make long 'compound quills'. The best quills are placed on the outside and broken and smaller pieces in the centre. These left in the shade to dry completely and to prevent warping. The long quills are then cut into smaller lengths and graded according to thickness, aroma and appearance. The quills can then be ground or processed into oil for cooking purposes.

Cinnamon and its medicinal properties

It is a well known fact that honey and cinnamon are important herbs used in Ayurveda and oriental system of medicine. It is found that a mixture of Honey and Cinnamon can cure most diseases.

Ayurvedic practitioners have been using honey as a vital medicine for centuries. Scientists of today also accept the combination of honey and cinnamon as a very effective medicine for all kinds of diseases.

These cures are for your reference only. If you suffer from any of these ailments it is recommended you see your doctor before you start out on any cures as there might be an adverse reaction with some prescription drugs.

HEART DISEASES

A paste of honey and cinnamon powder, applied on bread or chapatti and eaten regularly for breakfast can help reduce the bad cholesterol in the blood. Regular use of the above process can relieve loss of breath.

ARTHRITIS

One part honey to two parts of lukewarm water with a small teaspoon of cinnamon powder made into a paste and massaged onto the affected part of the body has been known to reduce the pain substantially.

Arthritis patients may take daily, morning and night, one cup of hot water with two spoons of honey and one small teaspoon of cinnamon powder. If taken regularly can help chronic arthritis sufferers.

BLADDER INFECTIONS

Two tablespoons of cinnamon powder and one teaspoon of honey in a glass of lukewarm water when drunk regularly can help destroy the bacteria in the bladder.

CHOLESTEROL

Two tablespoons of honey and three teaspoons of Cinnamon Powder mixed in 16 ounces of tea water, given to a cholesterol patient, has been claimed to reduce the level of cholesterol in the blood by 10%.

As mentioned for arthritic patients, if taken 3 times a day, chronic cholesterol may be cured.

COLDS

When suffering from common or severe cold one tablespoon lukewarm honey with 1/4 spoon cinnamon powder taken daily for 3 days can cure most chronic cough, cold and clear the sinuses.

UPSET STOMACH

Honey taken with cinnamon powder can cure stomach ache and can also clear stomach ulcers.

BLOATEDNESS

According to the studies done in India & Japan, it is revealed that when honey is taken with cinnamon powder significant reduction in bloatedness may be noted.

IMMUNE SYSTEM

Daily use of honey and cinnamon powder can strengthen the immune system and protect the body from bacteria and viral attacks.

INDIGESTION

Cinnamon powder sprinkled on two tablespoons of honey taken before food, relieves acidity and digests the heaviest of meals.

FLU

A scientist in Spain has proved that honey contains a natural ingredient, which kills the Flu bacteria and saves the patient from the severe effects of the Flu.

ANTI AGING

Tea made with honey and cinnamon powder, when taken regularly can arrest the ravages of old age. 4 spoons of honey, 1 spoon of cinnamon powder and 3 cups of water boiled and drunk like tea can keep the skin fresh and soft whilst arresting old age.

ACNE

Three parts of honey and one part of cinnamon powder when applied on the affected area before sleeping can help cure acne.

SKIN INFECTIONS

Applying honey and cinnamon powder in equal parts on affected parts can cure eczema, ringworm and all types of skin infections.

WEIGHT LOSS

A warm drink made of honey and cinnamon powder boiled in water for a few minutes can help with weight loss if sipped at least twice a day. Regular intake of this mixture inhibits accumulation of fat in the body. Of course this needs to be implemented with a healthy diet.

CANCER

Recent research in Japan and Australia has revealed that cancer of the stomach and bones has been cured in some cases depending on the degree and stage of the cancer.

FATIGUE

Senior citizens, who take honey and cinnamon powder in equal parts, are more alert and flexible. Research shows that half a tablespoon of honey taken in a glass of water and sprinkled with cinnamon powder, daily at about 3.00 p.m. when energy levels start to flag, can help boost energy levels within a week.

BAD BREATH

People of South America, first thing in the morning gargle with one teaspoon of honey and cinnamon powder mixed in hot water to keep their breath fresh throughout the day.

With so many promising benefits who wouldn't be tempted to include this interesting spice in our daily cooking.

Cinnamon in cooking

Experts say that true (Ceylon) Cinnamon should be reserved for sweet and delicate dishes and Cassia for savoury dishes and stewed fruits. However, as many of us have probably been using

commercially ground cinnamon which is sometimes a mixture of cassia and cinnamon, we are not going to start a “snob” fad are we.

Most of the cuisines from the areas where cinnamon grows, feature it heavily in savoury dishes such as curries, roasted meats, vegetable and rice dishes, as do Arabic and North African cuisines – Tagines are an excellent example. It's also contained in spices mixes such as the Indian Garam Masala, the Moroccan Ras el Hanout and the Chinese Five spice.

We have so far tended to favour its use in sweet recipes such as biscuits, cakes and desserts although this is changing with the huge exchange of culinary cultures which has taken place in more recent times.

As with most spices, Cinnamon should be kept in a cool dark place in an air-tight container where it will keep its aroma and flavour for many months.

Also with all spices you need to experiment with the amounts to discover your own preferences! Also do try using them out of context i.e. in dishes that you would never use them in ordinarily.

Here are some nutritious recipes to experiment with:

Carrot and Ginger Soup

Ingredients

1 tsp Olive Oil
1 onion, finely chopped
900g carrots, coarsely chopped
1 litre fresh chicken or vegetable stock
¼ tsp cinnamon powder
2 tbsp finely chopped ginger
1 tsp vanilla extract
90ml Sour Cream



Instructions

1. Heat the oil in a large saucepan until hot, add the onion and sauté for 5 minutes.
2. Add the carrots and stir to coat then add the stock, mix well, reduce the heat, cover and simmer for 20 minutes until carrots are tender.

3. Remove from heat and allow to cool slightly then transfer to a blender or food processor and process until smooth.

4. Add sour cream, vanilla, and ginger, and process to mix well adding a little more stock if the soup is too thick.

5. Return to the rinsed out saucepan, add cinnamon powder and gently heat through. Serve hot!

Egyptian Meatballs

Ingredients

450g finely minced beef/chicken
1 medium onion, grated
4 tbsp fresh chopped flat-leaf parsley
2 tbsp freshly chopped mint
1 tsp salt
1 tsp black pepper
1 tsp cumin powder
1 tsp ground cinnamon
1 tsp ground allspice
1 tsp olive oil



To serve

Pitta Breads
Finely chopped tomatoes
Finely sliced spring onion
Shredded lettuce

Instructions

1. Place all ingredients (apart from the oil) in a large mixing bowl and knead well with your hands making sure the mixture is well blended. Cover with Clingfilm and chill for 1 hour

2. Preheat the grill and rack or a griddle to hot. Form the meat mixture into 8 flattened meatballs or mould around skewers.

3. Lightly oil the hot grill rack or griddle then place the flattened meatballs onto the hot rack/griddle and cook for 5 minutes on each side, brushing with a little oil.

Serve in pita breads with the tomato, onion and shredded lettuce.

Baked Spicy Ratatouille

Ingredients:

1 large ripe aubergine cubed
1 large courgette cubed
1 large onion, roughly chopped
3 tbsp olive oil
2 garlic cloves finely chopped
800g chopped tomatoes
Zest of 1 orange
1/2 tsp cinnamon powder
1 tbsp finely chopped fresh ginger
Salt and black Pepper
200g puff pastry
1 egg beaten

Instructions

1. Heat the oil in a large saucepan, add the onion, garlic, aubergine and courgette and sauté until lightly browned on all sides.
2. Add the tomatoes, orange zest, cinnamon, ginger, salt and pepper cover, and simmer for 15-20 minutes.
3. Preheat the oven to 200C, 400F, Gas Mark 6 and lightly grease a shallow oven-proof dish.
4. Roll the pastry out to 5mm/1/4 inch thickness large enough to cover the top of the dish.
5. Transfer the ratatouille into the dish and cover dish with pastry pressing it firmly onto the edges of the dish.
6. Brush the pastry with the egg and make a small slit in the centre. Bake for 20-25 minutes until brown and risen. Serve hot.

Apple and Cinnamon delight

4 Granny Smith Apples
1 tbsp of water

½ cup caster sugar
¼ tsp cinnamon powder

For the cake

100 gms of low fat margarine
½ cup brown sugar
2 eggs
¼ cup milk
1 and ¼ cup plain flour
2 tsp baking powder
¼ tsp salt
¼ tsp vanilla essence



Instructions

Apple filling

1. Peel, core and slice apples 5mm. Place the apples in a saucepan with 1/2 cup sugar, cinnamon powder and water.
2. Cover and cook gently for 5 minutes until tender.
3. Pour the hot apples into a 20cm pie dish and sprinkle with cinnamon.

Cake

1. Sift the flour, baking powder and salt together.
2. Beat the butter and sugar in mixer until creamed, add the eggs one at a time, then 1 tblsp of the flour, the milk and vanilla. Fold in the remaining flour by hand without losing volume in the mixture.
3. Pour over the HOT apples and spread the mixture evenly.
(it's important that the apples are hot when the cake mixture goes in)
4. Bake at 190C/380F for 30-35 minutes until set and lightly coloured.
5. Serve with custard and ice cream.

A quick and easy dessert that is guaranteed to wow the palettes of kids and adults alike.

These are just some of the recipes that include cinnamon as a spice or flavour. You could always try adding cinnamon to your coffee or lemonade or other recipes whilst cooking. Then sit back and enjoy the double benefit of the slightly exotic flavour with the fantastic health benefits!