



FOOD MATTERS

with Consultant Nutritionist Sue Radd



CINNAMON: culinary spice or medicine?

The discovery that cinnamon can make cells in the body more sensitive to insulin and lower your blood sugar has opened a debate: should this ancient spice (and the many preparations that now include it) be considered a food or a medicine?

The answer may depend on how you use it.

who may benefit?

Research shows that people with type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, and women who have insulin resistance as a result of polycystic ovarian syndrome, may stand to gain by incorporating one to six grams of cinnamon daily into their diet. The naturally occurring polyphenols in cinnamon affect multiple factors relating to blood sugar and insulin function.

But not all studies show benefits. The payback you receive may depend on how much cinnamon you consume, the length of time you take it, which form you use (there are capsules, extracts, and oils—not just sticks and ground spice), and the severity of your misbehaving blood sugar.

which cinnamon?

Two main types of cinnamon are popu-

lar in the culinary world. “True” cinnamon (*cinnamomum zeylanicum*) comes from Sri Lanka. It’s more expensive and lighter in color. But *cinnamomum cassia* is the one that has been most tested in research. This darker and redder “cinnamon” comes from China, Vietnam, and Indonesia, and has a penetrating, sweet smell with an agreeable level of bitterness. As it is cheaper and sweeter, most commercially baked goods contain cassia. You will get cassia when you buy McCormick’s in the supermarket, even though it is labeled as ground cinnamon. Indian stores also commonly provide ground cassia, even though it too is labeled as cinnamon. If in doubt, check with your supplier.

3 ways to eat it

Following are some suggestions for using cinnamon:

1. Add a cinnamon stick when making compote (fruit soup) or herbal tea.
2. Mix in a teaspoon (three grams) of ground cinnamon (cassia) when cooking rolled oats, blending a smoothie, or preparing pancake batter.
3. Combine it with other spices to flavor curries, chutneys, and puddings, for example, as in Chinese five spice and *garam masala*.

Nutritionist Sue Radd is the award-winning author of *The Breakfast Book* and coauthor of *Eat To Live*, internationally acclaimed for showing how savvy eating can combat cancer and heart disease and improve well-being. See www.sueradd.com for more nutrition information.