

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Cinnamon in your Medicine Cabinet?

You surely know what cinnamon tastes and smells like. Fresh cinnamon buns, cinnamon toast, cinnamon applesauce, even cinnamon-scented tea - they're all wonderful. Most of us know cinnamon as a sweet spice, one of the main ingredients in apple and pumpkin pie flavors, and in lots of gooey breakfast sweets.

But if you were able to ask a Roman cook from 2000 years ago what they used cinnamon for, you would probably get a blank stare. The cooks never used cinnamon. Cinnamon was very expensive and highly prized. To be able to buy and use cinnamon was a sign that you were rich and belonged to the upper class of people. You did not eat it!

The only places cinnamon is mentioned in ancient Greek or Roman writing are in the doctors' medical manuals. Several ancient books include cinnamon in lists of prescriptions for various diseases. It was considered a hot spice, similar to the way we think of hot peppers. They used it to treat everything from cramps, diarrhea and gas to impotence and menopause. The Egyptians used cinnamon as part of their embalming process, to preserve the bodies when they made mummies.

It wasn't until the Middle Ages that people started using cinnamon for its flavor. Probably it was used to help cover up the flavor or smell of partly spoiled food, since there were no refrigerators and the only preservative was salt.

Now, when we use cinnamon in so many everyday foods, our doctors are starting to look at cinnamon again for its medical properties. The Egyptians used it to

embalm bodies because it does have the ability to stop the growth of some bacteria, molds and yeasts. So, it might have been a preservative for the cooks in the Middle Ages. Today researchers are studying whether we might be able to use it as a food preservative too.

Some of the chemicals in cinnamon have been studied as ways to help people manage their diabetes. Cinnamon or cinnamon extracts have been given to small groups of people with diabetes. Some of them found that their blood sugar went down after they'd been eating it for 6 weeks. Once they stopped, the sugar went back up in most people. Some of these people also found that their cholesterol levels went down when they were eating the cinnamon every day.

In test tubes or lab rats, cinnamon also seems to be an antioxidant. And it might stop the growth of some kinds of tumor cells. If it will work, or how it would work in human bodies is not yet known. At least one researcher says that taking high doses won't do any good because the saliva in our mouths reacts with it and probably inactivates some of it. He suggests that half a teaspoon a day might be enough to slow the progress of diabetes. No one else is willing to make any recommendations. Maybe cinnamon will get there eventually, but it's not in the medicine cabinet yet!

Cinnamon in foods is certainly safe. Adding cinnamon to your tea won't hurt you. Sprinkling some on your toast, or adding some to the coffee pot before you brew your morning cup might be a good idea. Eating oatmeal with cinnamon (instead of toast), and having a glass of orange juice with cinnamon (instead of or in addition to your coffee) is a healthier breakfast. But even with cinnamon, those gooey sticky cinnamon rolls are not on a healthy breakfast menu!

Here's a recipe for some lower fat, higher fiber breakfast muffins, with cinnamon

too. Leave the peel on the apples for fiber. You could replace some of the chopped apples with blueberries if you want extra color. Enjoy!

Cinnamon Apple Muffins

1 cup all purpose flour	1 cup whole wheat flour
½ cup sugar	1 ½ tsp baking soda
2 eggs	1 cup low fat or fat free vanilla yogurt
3 Tbsp butter, melted and cooled	2 tsp ground cinnamon
1 cup finely chopped apples	

Preheat oven to 375° F. Grease muffin pan or put papers in muffin cups.

Sift all dry ingredients together in one bowl. In second bowl blend the eggs, yogurt and butter together. Pour into dry ingredients, add chopped apples, and stir just until mixed.

Divide into 12 muffin cups. Bake for 20-25 minutes.

Makes 12 large muffins.

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