

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Fungi in Our Cup and Plates

Beyond the humble mushroom, from coffee to chicken, it seems that fungi (or funguses!) are showing up more often in our kitchens. Recently a question came in about a new, 'healthier' coffee called Ganoderma. And Quorn® products are now in our local stores, and raising questions too. They're very different products, but both come from the mushroom world.

Ganoderma is the family name for those big bracket mushrooms. You've probably seen them, looking like half a plate sticking out of the side of tree. Some can kill our palm trees, others prefer things like dying oaks. There are about 80 different kinds in the family. Some kinds are used to clean up sludge.

And one of them has apparently been used for generations in Asia as an herbal medicine. There it's called Lingzhi or Reishi. Now it's become really popular here too. There's a whole long list of illnesses or conditions that it's claimed to help, from boosting the immune system to curing HIV. Extracts from a couple different kinds do slow down cancer cells *in test tubes*. One study found no changes in heart disease markers, immunity or DNA damage in people who'd been taking capsules for a month. There is no good evidence that drinking or eating it really works in living people.

You can buy ganoderma as a powder, capsules or liquid extract. As for the coffee, most of the products seem to have ganoderma extract added to the coffee. But only one company actually said they used extract. So others might just have ground up fungus. And who knows how much, if any, is actually in the packet you purchase? Who knows if the extract survives the boiling to make the coffee? It doesn't change the coffee, it's just an additive. Or maybe the coffee is just a better tasting way to get you to drink it. Some friends say their coffee tastes milder with it.

There are some known side effects, such as rashes, nose bleeds and dry mouth, and people who are allergic to mushrooms should avoid it. There's some concern too, since it has gummy starches, that it might affect how well you can absorb some medications. So don't drink it when you

take your meds.

Quorn® is completely different. The package calls it 'mycoprotein'. Myco means mold or fungus. This fungus is grown in huge tanks and fed sugar as well as the vitamins and minerals it needs. As it grows it produces protein and fiber. The purified protein is then treated to have a texture like meat. The nutritional quality of the protein is really very good. And Quorn® is one of the few protein sources that also has fiber.

It is also cholesterol-free and very low in fat. Because it's over half protein, which is very high, some people might have a reaction to it. People who are allergic to mushrooms probably shouldn't try it. But reports of any kind of reaction are rare.

These products are not completely vegetarian. Many of them have egg whites, and some have milk protein to help the pieces stick together. A few use potato protein and do qualify as vegetarian. They're all shaped and flavored to look and feel like meat.

Quorn® products are in the freezer case, in a variety of flavors and forms. There are chicken-like cutlets, tenders and nuggets, beef-like burgers and crumbles, and lots of ready-to-heat products like spaghetti with 'meat'balls or burritos. The chick'n cutlets I tried tasted fine. When I just heated them in the skillet the texture was a little dry. But putting them in a stir-fry with sauce was much better. The crumbles can be used in dishes such as soups, stews, chili or casseroles.

Here's an easy chicken dish for dinner that could use Quorn® chicken tenders or cutlet as easily as chicken breast fillets. If you're adventurous, or just looking to cut down on meat, try them. If you have chicken in the refrigerator, use it. Enjoy!

Cheesy Baked Chicken

4 chicken breast fillets, 3-4 oz each, or 12-16 oz of Quorn® chicken cutlets or tenders

4 slices Swiss cheese 1 (10-oz) can lower sodium cream of chicken soup

½ cup skim milk ½ cup fat-free sour cream

1 ½ cups herb-seasoned stuffing mix

Thaw chicken or Quorn® if necessary. Preheat oven to 350° F. Arrange in single layer in shallow baking dish. Top each piece of chicken with a slice of cheese. Cut slices in half if necessary. Mix soup, milk and sour cream in bowl. Pour over chicken. Sprinkle stuffing mix over top. Cover dish with foil and bake 45 minutes. Remove foil and bake 15 minutes longer until chicken reaches 165° F in center. Serves 4.

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