



THE PLAIN DEALER

NUTRI-Q&A

Studies look at cinnamon for medicinal benefits

Wednesday, September 29, 2004

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I have diabetes and high cholesterol. Recently, I've been hearing that cinnamon may help me. Frankly, I would rather use natural products than take medicine.

Cinnamon has been used for years in traditional remedies, and interest in the medicinal qualities of botanicals is at an all-time high. But it's probably too early to trade in your medicine cabinet for a spice cabinet.

The current excitement about cinnamon was prompted by a study published in the December 2003 issue of *Diabetes Care*, suggesting that cinnamon might lower blood glucose, triglycerides and cholesterol in people with Type 2 diabetes. Daily supplements of 1 to 3 grams of cinnamon (½ to 1½ teaspoons) lowered fasting glucose (18 percent-29 percent), triglyceride (23 percent-30 percent), LDL-cholesterol (7 percent-27 percent) and total cholesterol (12 percent-26 percent).

How does it work? Animal and laboratory studies suggest that cinnamon might improve the sensitivity of body cells to insulin.

Great news, right? Well, maybe. The results are promising, but this is the first human study, and the sample size was small. Cinnamon was not as effective as statin drugs in reducing cholesterol. In short, we need more data before we can be sure that cinnamon offers health benefits and what dose is safe and effective. In the meantime, don't rush out to Cinnabon or dig out your grandmother's recipe for apple crisp.

A big dose of calories, fat and carbohydrates won't do your blood glucose or your waistline any good. The study subjects took their cinnamon in capsules.

You might stir a little cinnamon into your oatmeal. But check with your doctor first.

Other "seasonal" news

Wonder what other culinary herbs and spices are being evaluated for health benefits?

Ginger: In a study published in the April 2004 issue of *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, ginger was found to be helpful in relieving the nausea of pregnancy.

It also has been studied as a therapy for motion sickness.

Garlic: According to a 1997 study, garlic is the most commonly used dietary supplement in U.S. households.

Although research studies have been mixed, there is evidence that garlic might normalize blood cholesterol, reduce blood pressure, prevent cancer and function as a blood thinner.

Let your doctor know if you are taking either ginger or garlic in large amounts.

Remember: Any herbal remedy strong enough to help is strong enough to interact with other medications or affect your health in other ways.

E-mail your nutrition questions, including your name or initials and the city in which you live, to food@plaind.com

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