Cinnamon – Ceylon Vs Cassia, Health Benefits, and Other Interesting Facts

Cinnamon comes from the bark of evergreen trees of the genus cinnamomum. When cinnamon is harvested, the bark is stripped and sun dried. As it dries, cinnamon curls into a well-known shape, called quills. If not ground, it is then sold as whole cinnamon or cinnamon sticks.

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Cinnamon was once one of the most highly sought after commodities on the planet. This spice has been in use for thousands of years as a medicine, as an embalming agent, as a means of preserving food, and as a flavoring enhancing spice. The earliest reports of cinnamon date back to ancient Egypt in 2000 B.C. The Egyptians used both cinnamon and the related spice, cassia, as embalming agents. Cinnamon was also used in the Old Testament as an ingredient in anointing oil.

Tales of Cinnamon’s Origin

Europeans were aware that cinnamon was shipped from the Red Sea through the trading ports of Egypt, but where exactly it came from was a mystery. In an effort to maintain their trade monopoly, Arab traders wove elaborate stories about the origins of cinnamon. These stories further helped to justify cinnamon’s scarcity and exorbitant prices.

Sier de Joinville believed the fanciful stories he was given of cinnamon’s origin. Joinville told his king in 1248 that cinnamon was pulled up in nets at the source of the Nile, all the way out at the edge of the world.

An Arab, Herodotus, came to believe that the mythical cinnamologus birds gathered cinnamon sticks from a distant unknown land. The cinnamologus birds made their nests so high in the mountains that no one could climb them. According to this myth, the method of collection was to leave large chunks of ox meat below these nests and wait for the birds to collect them. When the birds gathered the meat into the nest, the increased weight would cause them to collapse, enabling people to gather the cinnamon sticks at the base of the mountain.

Another wild cinnamon origin story claimed that cinnamon was harvested within deep canyons, relentlessly guarded by monstrous snakes.

The 1st century Roman philosopher, Pliny the Elder, reasoned that cinnamon hails from Ethiopia. Cinnamon, he reasoned, was carried on rafts bereft of oars or sails and propelled by “man alone and his courage.”

Wars and Exploration for Cinnamon

Exploration of the new world was primarily motivated by a desire to expand the spice trade. At the time of Columbus’

expedition, cinnamon was at the height of its demand. Expanding the spice trade was one of the primary reasons for Columbus' expedition. Columbus sent back what he thought was cinnamon from the New World. It was not cinnamon, however. Cinnamon country had yet to be found.

European efforts to find the source of cinnamon fell short until 1518 when the Portuguese located cinnamon at Ceylon (now known as Sri Lanka). With ruthless precision, the Portuguese conquered the island kingdom of Kotto and enslaved the population in order to monopolize the cinnamon trade.

The Portuguese maintained control of the region for a century, until the occupied people allied with the Dutch in 1638 to wrestle control of the region away from the Portuguese. Their combined efforts were successful, and they eliminated Portuguese control of the region. The Dutch made the island kingdom beholden to them for their military aide. The island people traded one European oppressor for another. The Dutch held the cinnamon monopoly for the next 150 years.

The British later conquered Ceylon in 1784. However cinnamon had begun to be cultivated in other parts of the world, and by the year 1800 it was no longer the rare precious commodity it once was.

Cinnamon Varieties



There are hundreds of types of Cinnamon, but there are only four varieties used for commercial purposes. The cinnamon known as "true cinnamon" is Ceylon cinnamon. This is the only variety that many other countries refer to as cinnamon. Other varieties are known as cassia.

Other cinnamon varieties, which are much more common in North America, are easier to produce and less expensive than Ceylon cinnamon. Cassia (Chinese) cinnamon, Saigon cinnamon, and Korintje are typically all lumped in together and referred to as cassia cinnamon, though they are each distinctively different. Each of these three closely related spices are much stronger and more pungent than Ceylon cinnamon.

In North America, when cinnamon is used as an ingredient or sold on the shelves as simply “cinnamon”, it is typically Korintje or cassia (Tung Hing).

	Ceylon	**Cassia**	**Korintje**	**Saigon**
Other Names	Cinnamomum Verum, Sweet Cinnamon, True Cinnamon, Mexican Cinnamon, Cinnamomum Zeylanicum	Chinese Cinnamon, Tung Hing	Padang Cassia, Indonesian Cinnamon	Vietnamese Cassia, Vietnamese Cinnamon
Scientific Name	Cinnamomum Verum	Cinnamomum Aromaticum	Cinnamomum Burmanni	Cinnamomum Loureiroi
Country of Origin	Sri Lanka (90%), India, Madagascar, Brazil, and the Caribbean	China	Indonesia	Vietnam
Taste	Mild, sweet	Spicy, bitter	Spicy, pungent	Spicy, slightly sweet

Color	Light to medium reddish brown	Dark reddish brown	Dark reddish brown	Dark reddish brown
Aroma	sweet, complex	Intense, pungent	Intense, spicy, pungent	Spicy
Price	Expensive	Cheap	Cheap	Medium
Coumarin	0.017 g/kg	0.31 g/kg	2.15 g/kg	6.97 g/kg

Ceylon Cinnamon

Ceylon cinnamon is grown in Sri Lanka, Madagascar, Brazil, India, and the Caribbean. This variety is more popular in much of Europe, Latin America, Mexico, the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. Indian curries and desert recipes of the lighter variety that call for cinnamon are typically referring to Ceylon cinnamon. Ceylon is the sweetest and mildest tasting and the lightest in color. It’s also three to four times more expensive than the other varieties.

Ceylon has less coumarin than the other varieties, and is often recommended above others by the alternative health community and many conventional doctors as well, since coumarin can cause liver damage in high dosages (more on that below).

Cassia Cinnamon (Chinese Cinnamon)

It can get a little confusing here since all three non-Ceylon varieties are often referred to as cassia cinnamon, while the Chinese Cinnamon is often referred to as cassia cinnamon. In other words, Cassia cinnamon may refer to Chinese cinnamon or it may refer to one of the other non-Ceylon cinnamons: Saigon cinnamon or Korintjr cinnamon.

Today, Tung Hing, the Chinese cinnamon is mostly grown in

China, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. This variety is spicy, bitter and very intense.

Saigon Cinnamon

Known as Vietnamese cinnamon or Vietnamese cassia, Saigon cinnamon's scientific name is Cinnamomum Loureiroi. It comes from an evergreen tree indigenous to Southeast Asia. Saigon cinnamon is closely related to Chinese cinnamon. Saigon cinnamon has around 1-5% essential oil content and 25% cinnamaldehyde in the essential oil, which is the highest of all the cinnamon species.

Saigon cinnamon's bark is similar to that of Tung Hing, but with a more pronounced and complex aroma. In Vietnamese cuisine, Saigon cinnamon bark is an important ingredient in many dishes including pho, the well-known noodle soup.

Saigon cinnamon has a volatile oil content of around 7%, which gives it a very bold and robust flavor that is ideal for cooking and for use in sauces.

Korintje Cinnamon

Fragrant Korintje cinnamon is as intense and spicy as Chinese cinnamon, but it is also a bit smoother. Korintje cinnamon from Indonesia accounts for most of the cinnamon imported into the U.S. Although lacking the depth of Chinese cinnamon, the flavor is smoother. Korintje cinnamon is a common choice for commercial bakeries in North America because of its good flavor and lower cost.

Coumarin in Cinnamon and Liver Damage

Ceylon cinnamon benefits are marketed as superior to the less expensive Cassia spices primarily due to Ceylon cinnamon's

ultra low levels of a chemical called coumarin, a blood thinner that is toxic to the liver and prevalent in much higher levels in the three cassia spices. It’s not anything most people need to worry about; the risk for any damage with normal or even much higher than normal consumption of cassia cinnamon is negligible.

For flavoring food, go with any and all varieties and discover what works best for each food. As a medicinal supplement though, if you want to take regular, relatively large doses, it may make sense to stick with Ceylon cinnamon for this purpose.

It should also be known that any cinnamon in very large doses will make one sick. Check out the cinnamon challenge; the objective is to film oneself swallowing a spoonful of ground cinnamon in under 60 seconds without drinking anything:

We don’t recommend trying it. The cinnamon challenge is a little risky. If you are taking cinnamon as a supplement in capsule form, it’s typically a good idea to take it with food, and don’t overdo it.

Health Benefits of Cinnamon

While there are definitely color, taste, and texture variations between Ceylon, Cassia, Korintje, and Saigon cinnamon, the differences in respect to health benefits are minor.

Nutrients – One teaspoon of Cinnamon Powder has up to 16% of the U.S. recommended daily allowance for Manganese, 5% for fiber 3% for iron, and 3% for calcium.

Cinnamon, Blood, and Inflammation

Reduction

Cinnamon helps reduce unwanted blood platelet clotting, which can result in inadequate blood flow, and is a common symptom of various diseases and overall poor health. Cinnamon inhibits the release of arachidonic acid (an inflammatory fatty acid) and reduces its formation. Cinnamon also removes blood impurities and helps to improve blood circulation due to the presence of a blood-thinning compound.

Cinnamon Is a Powerful Antimicrobial Spice

Cinnamon is antibacterial, antifungal, antiviral, and antiparasitic.

Cinnamon can be used as a food preservative. Just a few drops of cinnamon essential oil to approximately 3 ounces of carrot broth inhibited the growth of the food-borne pathogenic Bacillus cereus for at least 60 days in the refrigerator. When the broth was refrigerated without the addition of cinnamon oil, the bacteria flourished.

Multiple studies have shown cinnamon’s effectiveness with a multitude of viruses including but not limited to HIV, herpes, and the adenovirus. Cinnamon even shows promise with cancer.

Cancer Preventer

Studies have shown that cinnamon and cinnamon oil shows promise with treating tumors, gastric cancers, melanomas, leukemia, colon cancer, and lymphoma cancer.

Antioxidant

Cinnamon a powerful antioxidant. In a study that compared the antioxidant activity of 26 spices, cinnamon wound up as the clear winner, even outranking “superfoods” like garlic and

oregano. In another study, cinnamon, anise, ginger, licorice, mint, nutmeg, vanilla, and artificial preservatives were looked at to see which compounds prevented oxidation most effectively. Mint came in first; cinnamon came in second.

Blood Sugar, Diabetes, and Cinnamon

Cinnamon stabilizes blood sugar levels, which can help with weight loss, and can also prevent, and even help reverse, diabetes and hypoglycemia. Cinnamon actually slows the rate at which the stomach empties after meals, reducing the rise in blood sugar after eating. Cinnamon also stimulates insulin receptors and inhibits an enzyme that inactivates insulin receptors while it enhances muscle cells' insulin-signaling pathways, which increases the body's ability to properly utilize glucose.

One study found Cassia cinnamon was almost twice as effective as the same amount of Ceylon cinnamon for controlling blood sugar. On the other hand, if you are concerned about coumarin consumption, you could double your Ceylon cinnamon dosage and not even come close to the high Coumarin levels found in Cassia Cinnamon. The general consensus is that approximately 1/2 of a teaspoon a day of cinnamon is effective for normalizing blood sugar.

Lowering LDL Cholesterol and Triglycerides

Studies have found that regular consumption of cinnamon is associated with a statistically significant decrease in levels of LDL cholesterol, triglycerides, and an increase in HDL cholesterol (known as the good cholesterol).

A controlled study was done with 60 people with type 2 diabetes. One group received cinnamon daily while the other group was giving a placebo. Forty days later, all of the cinnamon group showed reduced blood sugar levels down by

18-29%; reduced triglycerides, down by 23-30%; reduced LDL cholesterol, down by 7-27%; and reduced total cholesterol, down by 12-26%. The placebo group saw no significant changes.

Cinnamon and the Brain

Folklore says the smell of cinnamon can cure the winter blues. No studies support this except for an interesting study that found the scent of cinnamon reduced driver irritability.

Cinnamon boosts the activity of the brain and removes nervous tension and memory loss. Researchers have proven that cinnamon improves cognitive abilities such as attention span, virtual recognition memory, working memory, and visual-motor response. Just the aroma or just the taste of cinnamon, can stimulate cognitive function.

Cinnamon consumption may delay the effects of, slow the effects of, and even reverse some of the effects of Alzheimer’s. In addition, some parents are using cinnamon to treat their children with ADHD.

Ways to Use Cinnamon

There are various essential oils extracted from various parts of the tree (not just the bark), and various species (as mentioned above) to choose from.

Cinnamon Stick Tea

1. 5 cups water in a metal pot or glass kettle
2. Add one cinnamon stick (3 inch length)
3. Cinnamon sticks should be boiled slowly. Set the heat setting to as low as possible to sustain a low, slow boil and cook 15 to 25 minutes.
4. Let it steep/rest for 15 minutes.
5. You may reheat before serving. It yields

just over a cup.

Enhanced Golden Milk Tea Recipe

This is a new twist on an ancient way of experiencing the benefits of turmeric. Ideally, use all fresh, unadulterated herbs whenever available.

- 1 cup of warm Coconut Milk
- 1 tablespoon of freshly grated turmeric with skin
- 1 teaspoon ground Cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon freshly grated ginger with skin
- 1 pinch of black pepper
- Pinch of cayenne pepper

Mix it all up and drink. I you prefer to drink it warm, only heat the coconut milk; be careful not to cook the other ingredients. Add the other ingredients when the coconut milk is cool enough to drink to preserve enzymes and other fragile micronutrients.

Household Disinfectant and Odor Neutralizer

Cinnamon has been proven to be good at killing bacteria including, e-coli and salmonella. Cinnamon oil kills bacteria that create odors as well.

Mix 10 drops of cinnamon essential oil in 2 cups of water in a spray bottle and use to disinfect counter tops, sinks, cabinets, doorknobs, toys etc.

Place three drops of cinnamon essential oil mixed with water on a diffuser to neutralize odors in a large room within minutes.

Tooth and Gum Health

Antibacterial properties of cinnamon remove harmful bacteria without damaging teeth or gums. Try using cinnamon with homemade mouthwash and toothpaste recipes. Also, try oil pulling with coconut oil and a few drops of cinnamon oil. See *Homemade DIY Oral Health*.

Insect Repellant

Cinnamon essential oil can be used for head lice treatment and to repel (or kill) ants, bed bugs, dust mites, roaches, and mosquitoes.

Skin Infections Like Athlete’s Foot

Try cinnamon oil on any topical skin infection, including athlete’s foot. It’s antimicrobial properties make quick work out of fungus.

Digestion

Cinnamon is very effective for treating indigestion, nausea, vomiting, upset stomach, diarrhea and flatulence. Cinnamon eliminates excess gas from the stomach and intestines, removes acidity, kills pathogens and acts as a diuretic to stop diarrhea. It relieves irritable bowel syndrome, reduces morning sickness, and is often referred to as a digestive tonic.

Menstruation

Cinnamon has been shown to provide relief from menstrual discomfort and cramping.

Breastfeeding

Regular consumption of cinnamon after childbirth delays menstruation, especially when combined with breastfeeding.

Many believe that cinnamon promotes healthier breast milk as well.

Massage

Cinnamon is also an anti-inflammatory substance that combined with carrier oil for massage, and when consumed, can help soothe and remove stiffness in muscles and joints.

Wound Healing

Cinnamon oil acts as a coagulant to stop excess bleeding and kills infectious pathogens, facilitating the healing process.

Conclusion

The cinnamon in your pantry is most likely many years old, stale, and of little potency. Stale cinnamon has reduced flavor and health benefits. It may be time to go cinnamon shopping. Be sure to check out garlic, turmeric, ginger, and more below.

Further Reading:

- The Amazing Herbal Power of Ginger
- Turmeric – Learn More about This Ayurvedic Herb
- Garlic – The Most Amazing Herb On The Planet
- How to Optimize Curcumin Absorption – With Golden Milk Tea Recipe
- Spices
- Foods, Vitamins, and Herbs That Kill Cancer

Sources:

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- *Cinnamon, ground* – World’s Healthiest Foods
- *Cinnamon Health Benefits* – Livestrong
- *Health Benefits of Cinnamon Oil* – Organic Facts
- *Ceylon or Cassia? Cinnamon Benefits Not a Matter of Variety* – The Home Economist
- *20 Health Benefits of Cinnamon* – Cinnamon Vogue
- *11 Health Benefits of Cinnamon You Need to Know* – Organic Authority
- *What is the difference between cinnamon and cassia?* – The World’s Healthiest Foods
- *Cinnamon’s Spicy History* – History
- *All About Cinnamon* – In Depth Info
- *Myths and Legends About Herbs and Spices* – E How
- *Cinnamon: Potential Role in the Prevention of Insulin Resistance, Metabolic Syndrome, and Type 2 Diabetes* – US National Library of Medicine
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