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Evidence suggests possible benefits with cinnamon for lowering blood sugar and blood fat levels, but additional studies are needed to confirm this.

Cinnamon refers to several plants native to Southeast Asia. The bark, rich in essential oil, is used as a flavoring agent and as a spice. Cinnamon has a long history of use as an herbal medicine.

Lab studies suggest that cinnamon has antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant properties. Studies in humans suggest it may help lower blood sugar, total cholesterol and triglyceride levels, and reduce risks for cardiovascular disease, stroke and diabetes. However, additional studies are needed to confirm these effects.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- **Diabetes**
Results have been mixed for various diabetes-related markers. A few meta-analyses suggest improvements in blood sugar and blood fat levels, but larger well-designed trials are needed to confirm these effects.
- **Inflammation**
Lab studies suggest that cinnamon can reduce inflammation, but human data are lacking.
- **Arthritis**
Cinnamon is used in traditional medicine for arthritis, but there is no scientific evidence to support this claim.

What are the side effects?

- GI upset: stomachache, heartburn, nausea, constipation, diarrhea

- Allergic reactions

Case reports

- Mouth sores: Associated with using oral cinnamon products like herbal toothpaste and gum.
- Occupational allergy: With cinnamon due to exposure to its compounds.
- Skin irritations: In one case with use of vaginal suppositories containing cinnamon oil, and in another case after consuming herbal tea that had large amounts of cinnamon.

What else do I need to know?

Patient Warnings:

- Some cinnamon products contain high levels of coumarin, a natural constituent, that can cause liver damage.

Do Not Take if:

- CYP450 2A6, 2C9, 2D, and 3A4 substrate drugs: Lab studies suggest cinnamon may increase the risk of side effects of these drugs. Clinical relevance has yet to be determined.
- Statins: When taken along with statins, cinnamon has been reported to cause hepatitis.
- Pioglitazone (an antidiabetic drug): Animal studies show that when used together, cinnamon can increase the bioavailability of pioglitazone.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Cinnamon - Last updated on June 8, 2021

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