Ceylon or cassia? The cinnamon in your tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

"Cinnamon" covers two different barks, and UK shops sell both under the same word.

- **Ceylon cinnamon** (*Cinnamomum verum*, sometimes called true cinnamon) is the lighter, more delicate one, grown mainly in Sri Lanka.
- **Cassia cinnamon** is the darker, hotter, cheaper one, and it is what most supermarket ground cinnamon and most cinnamon sticks in this country actually are.

The taste difference is real: Ceylon is softer, sweeter and more citrusy, cassia is punchier and more familiar to a British palate. But the reason to care is coumarin.

The coumarin difference

Cassia contains far more coumarin, a naturally occurring compound that can affect the liver in large, regular doses. Germany's federal risk assessment body, the BfR, describes Ceylon cinnamon as generally low in coumarin and cassia types as much higher, and recommends Ceylon for people who use substantial amounts of cinnamon regularly. BfR: coumarin in cinnamon (PDF)

In practice:

- **A cinnamon stick in a pot of chai now and then:** not something to worry about.
- **A heaped teaspoon of ground cassia in a mug every morning:** worth switching to Ceylon.
- **Cinnamon supplements or "cinnamon water" habits:** the amounts get much larger, and they are the case the BfR advice is aimed at.

How to tell them apart

	Ceylon	Cassia
Stick (quill)	Thin, brittle, many fine layers rolled together like a cigar	Thick, hard, one or two tight curls
Colour	Tan, light brown	Dark reddish brown
Snap	Crumbles easily	Hard, difficult to break
Smell	Delicate, sweet, citrusy	Strong, hot, spicy
Price	Higher	Lower

Ground cinnamon is the problem: you cannot tell them apart once it is powder. If the label does not say Ceylon, assume it is cassia.

What this means for tea

Most cinnamon in tea is a small amount inside a blend. A chai blend such as Tea India Masala Chai lists cinnamon among several spices, and each bag contains a fraction of a teaspoon.

If you make your own spiced tea daily, it is the one place where the choice is worth making:

- Use **a stick rather than powder**: easier to control, and the flavour is cleaner.
- Buy **Ceylon** if you drink it every day.
- Simmer the stick with the water for 5 minutes before adding tea and milk: you get more flavour from less.

Our chai spices guide covers the rest of the mix, and cinnamon tea covers the drink itself.

Cinnamon is a flavour, not a treatment

Cinnamon is regularly promoted for blood sugar and other health claims. The US National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health says studies do not clearly support cinnamon for any health condition, and notes that the species and plant part often are not identified on products. NCCIH on cinnamon

Enjoy it because it makes a lovely cup. If you have liver problems, take regular medicines, or are pregnant and thinking about concentrated cinnamon, ask a pharmacist.

Common questions

Is cassia cinnamon dangerous?
Not in normal cooking amounts. The concern is high, regular intake, which is why the BfR suggests Ceylon for heavy users.

Which is in my chai tea bag?
Usually cassia, and usually a small amount. Manufacturers rarely specify the species.

Does boiling remove coumarin?
No. Use less, or use Ceylon.

Which tastes better?
Cassia is bolder and more familiar in British baking; Ceylon is subtler and suits delicate teas. Try both in the same cup of tea and see which you prefer.

Earn rewards on teas.co.uk

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts
Create your free account
Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree
Plant a tree in Scotland
Pledge points to our reforestation partner.



teas.co.uk · Tunbridge Wells, Kent · hello@teas.co.uk · 3-click cancel at teas.co.uk/cancel/