

A wonderful alternative to sugar is STEVIA.

#### Benefits and Use of Stevia:

Stevia is a small shrub that is a native of Paraguay. The Indians there have used it for about 1500 years as a sweetener, a digestive aid tonic, and as a topical aid to wounds. This is another one of those instances where I find it very interesting, something that we think is something that is hot, new, a recent discovery, has actually been used for centuries, safely, I might add.

Stevia was discovered in the late 1800's by missionaries visiting the area, and that's how it came to be brought to the United States, Europe and Asia, as well as other areas of the world. It is non-toxic, it is nutrient rich: It contains substantial amounts of calcium, phosphorous, sodium, magnesium, zinc, vitamins A and C, and over 100 phytonutrients.

Stevia has been used for all sorts of things. People have reported that it can reduce cravings for alcohol and tobacco, and that it is effective for normalizing blood sugar levels and regulating blood pressure. Unlike a lot of sweeteners, it is not contraindicated for people who are dealing with candida.

According to research conducted by Hiroshima University School of Dentistry, and also the Purdue University Dental Research Group, stevia retards the formation of plaque and suppresses the growth of cavity-causing bacteria, and some people take stevia extract and mix it in their toothpaste, so that they can get the benefits of stevia for these purposes.

Topically, stevia has a lot of healing capabilities. Applied to a cut or scrape, it will sting right away, but then there's a significant reduction in the pain, with accelerated healing and reduced scarring. Whole leaf stevia extract can be used as a facemask. You use the liquid form, leave it on for between 30 to 60 minutes, and it tightens the skin, smoothes wrinkles, heals skin blemishes, and acne. It also can reduce symptoms of dermatitis and eczema as well. Adding stevia concentrate to shampoos, or applying it to hair after washing it, and then rinsing it out, is an excellent conditioner for hair.

Stevia can be purchased in a number of forms, including, dried leaf, leaf powder, tea, liquid tincture, extract, or concentrated. The less refined the stevia is, the better, and you should read labels pretty carefully, because some varieties have additives including alcohol.

The refined form of stevia is labeled as isolated stevioside, and it comes in a white powder or liquid extract. These forms are fine, and they are perfectly safe for sweetening. Unlike other sweeteners, again, the refining of stevia doesn't turn it to an 'anti-nutrient' (this is the best way to put it!) but remember that the refined forms don't contain all of the health benefits discussed previously. So, if you are going to use it for cuts, scrapes, as a facemask, or to control blood sugar, you would need to get an unrefined form.

Stevia does make an excellent sweetener for coffee and tea, and it can be sprinkled on cereals and fruits, or added to smoothies.

For those that are interested in using it as a dietary supplement for some of the purposes I have mentioned, like regulating blood sugar, it is now available in tablet form. Some people have reported that it reduces craving for food as well. It has been used as an appetite

suppressant, although I'm not crazy about that use - I want people to eat when they are hungry, but people have reported success with that, as well.

As I mentioned before, stevia's concentrated sweetness (200 to 300 times sweeter than sugar) makes it very difficult to use in baking and cooking at home. Certain applications aren't very practical, because it doesn't allow bread to rise, and so you can't use it for sweetening breads and that kind of thing. There are some conversion charts available, in terms of how much stevia you use to duplicate sugar in a recipe, however the problem is the ratio of dry and wet ingredients changes, and it is just not a very practical sweetener from that standpoint. This is, again, why we talk about sucranat as a better alternative.

The taste of stevia may take a little getting used to, but most of the people that I have introduced to it really like it once they try it, and one of the special advantages is that you can buy it in individual packets, which makes it something you can take into restaurants and avoid all the garbage they put on the table. So if you haven't already tried stevia, it's worth trying, and I think you'll find for some applications it is very tasty, and an excellent alternative.