

# "Spice" Up Your Holiday



Nutrition Notes by Natalie

Did we skip a holiday this year? I felt like one moment we were picking out Halloween costumes and trick or treating and "BAM", the next day Christmas was upon us! Thanksgiving, the forgotten holiday it seems. What a shame! It seems valuable in our restless society to stop and remember to give thanks. The official Christmas kick off used to start the day after Thanksgiving, but no more. In fact, a colleague of mine started listening to Christmas music on November 1st! Well, enough of my soapbox antics, by the time you are reading this article it will be the appropriate time to pull out the tinsel and dust off the holiday ornaments to get ready for the season.

Nothing says Christmas like a cup of warm cocoa. Call me crazy, but you know I have a thing for warm beverages! Did you know that leaving treats for Santa on Christmas Eve is a tradition in many countries? Unlike Americans, kids in other countries don't bother with milk and cookies, they leave out minced pie, rum cake, or even a pint of beer! I think it would be wise to keep Saint Nick sober this year and entice him with a warm, non-alcoholic beverage, like a traditional cup of cocoa. Not the mixes you find in the store or you get when you go to the high school football games. I am talking about true, authentic cocoa. But I must warn you, once you try it there will be no going back. Let's face it, hot chocolate from a packet is like adding water to your morning cornflakes! You haven't lived until you have indulged in the homemade version. So, let me introduce you to a recipe for cocoa that is sure to keep you off the "Naughty" list this season.

I like to call it "*Spicy Ho Ho Cocoa*". It's cocoa with a kick! Not spicy like a habanero, but seasoned with a blend of holiday spices and warmed to perfection. Cinnamon, milk, nutmeg, cocoa powder, vanilla and almond extracts, and brown sugar, "Oh My." Packed full of calcium and magnesium, this cocoa not only provides the necessary ingredients to keep your bones strong, but is sure to be pleasing to your palate. Did I mention it is low in calories and sugar for those of you watching your blood sugars and waistlines? Welcome this incredibly rich and satisfying guilt-free beverage to your home this Christmas. Here's what you will need:

## *Spicy Ho Ho Cocoa*

*1 Tablespoon unsweetened cocoa powder*

*2 teaspoons dark brown sugar*

*¼ teaspoon cinnamon*

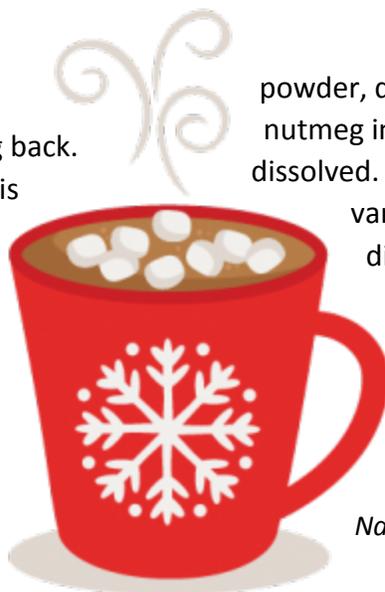
*1 Tablespoon hot boiling water*

*1 cup low fat 1% milk*

*½ teaspoon vanilla*

*A dash of almond extract and nutmeg*

In a large mug, mix the cocoa powder, dark brown sugar, cinnamon and nutmeg into hot water and stir until smooth and dissolved. Add the warm milk and stir in the vanilla and almond extracts. Want a different flavor? Substitute peppermint extract and eliminate the spices for a tasty peppermint hot cocoa. Add a dollop of fat-free cool whip, or sprinkle it with chopped peppermint candy, and enjoy. Cheers!



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