

## Not all holiday spice is nice, says toxicologist: Cinnamon, nutmeg and marshmallows abused for cheap thrills

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(Medical Xpress)—Watch your kitchen cupboards this season as thrill seekers look to common holiday baking ingredients for a rise – cinnamon, nutmeg and even marshmallows are the primary ingredients in an increasingly popular and high-risk game of "chicken."

"The envelope is always being pushed to create something new that will get attention, potentially create a druglike effect and can pass under the radar of [law enforcers](#)," said Christina Hantsch, MD, toxicologist, Department of [Emergency Medicine](#) at Loyola University Health System.

Loyola recently treated a dozen preteen children in its emergency room.

"A group of 9-year-olds were trying to do the [Cinnamon](#) Challenge and got caught," said Hantsch, who is a former medical director of the Illinois Poison Control. "One girl had seen videos on the Internet and wanted to try it with her friends."

The Cinnamon Challenge involves trying to swallow one tablespoon of ground cinnamon without water.

"The dry, loose cinnamon triggers a violent coughing effect and also a [burning sensation](#) that actually can lead to breathing and choking hazards," she said.

In 2011, poison centers received 51 calls about teen exposure to cinnamon. In just the first three months of 2012, poison centers received 139 calls. The American Association of Poison Control Centers reports that of those, 122 were classified as intentional misuse or abuse and 30 callers required [medical evaluation](#).

Hantsch is concerned that what was once horseplay by older teenagers is now being copied by younger children. "They have easy access to ingredients like cinnamon and marshmallows and think it is cool to do what their older peers are doing," Hantsch said.

Another challenge that continues to attract followers is called Chubby Bunny. "You stuff as many marshmallows in your mouth as possible and then try to say the words Chubby Bunny," Hantsch said.

"Two children have actually choked to death attempting this game, so it is not to be taken lightly."

Ground nutmeg has been snorted, smoked and eaten in large quantities to produce a marijuanalike high. "Nutmeg contains myristicin, which is a hallucinogenic, like LSD," the toxicologist said. Other common household products that are also being abused are hand sanitizer, aerosol whipped cream, aerosol cooking spray, ink markers and glue.

"Actually, there is a synthetic marijuana called Spice, or K2, that is very popular right now because it cannot be detected in standard drug tests," Hantsch said. "It also is marketed as a legal high, which it is not, but is dangerous because it has more adverse effects than cannabis."

The poison centers received 4,905 calls about exposure to K2 or Spice this year between Jan. 1 and Nov. 30.

Respiratory, cardiac and nerve damage have all been documented in

relation to substance abuse.

"Seemingly silly games can have sinister effects and the holidays are the worst time for this to happen," Hantsch said. "Kids have more free time, greater access to the Internet and more opportunities to get together during vacations. And at Christmas, the kitchen pantry is loaded for holiday baking. Adults are wise to keep an eye on their children to make sure they are using the ingredients for their proper use."

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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