Benefits of flaxseed [1]

Alice,

What are the benefits of flaxseed? Heck, what is flaxseed? Thanx!

Answer

Dear Reader,

Flaxseed ? you may have seen it as ingredient touted in baked goods, smoothies, trail mix, or a variety of other products. But do most consumers really know the flaxseed history? Thanks for asking this question so we can get to the root of this supposed wonder-seed.

As its name would suggest, flaxseed is? a seed from the flax plant! These sometimes golden or reddish brown seeds come from the flax herb (Linum usitatissimum), and are about the same size as sesame seeds. The National Institutes of Health [2] (NIH) suggests this blue flowering plant may have originated in Egypt. While small in size and mild in flavor, flaxseeds pack a nutritional punch! Many praise flaxseeds due to their omega-3 fatty acid content [3]? one of the best sources around for those who don?t eat fish. But including flaxseed in your diet can also be a good source of:

- Lignans [4]? a kind of plant hormone that may have antioxidant properties
- Fiber [5]? potentially helpful with constipation and controlling appetite

The health benefits of flaxseeds are still under investigation ? and some trusted sources like Mayo Clinic [6] and the NIH [7] differ on how effective flaxseed may be for various ailments. Despite the differences, current research suggests flaxseed is most useful for improving:

- Constipation
- Hemoglobin A1C (a three month average measure of blood sugar levels) for people with type II diabetes
- Cholesterol levels for those with a history of high cholesterol
- Kidney function for people with systemic lupus erythematosus [8]

Though you may have heard that flaxseed is suggested as helpful with a long list of other health issues (e.g., breast pain, various cancers, menopause symptoms, weight loss, etc.), there is not enough scientific evidence to demonstrate effectiveness for these conditions yet.

Lastly, here are some cautions and considerations to think about prior to sprinkling flaxseed
on or into your foodstuffs:

- Drink plenty of water because of the decent dose of fiber content in flaxseed, sufficient hydration is important to avoid constipation or in rare cases, intestinal blockage.
- Consult a health care provider if you are taking medications, supplements, or herbs. Flaxseed may interact with or decrease absorption of some of these!
- Look for the differences between flax products. Benefits of flaxseeds can vary from reaped from flaxseed oil. While it has omega-3 fatty acids, the oil does not have the fiber or lignan benefits!
- Using ground flaxseed versus whole flaxseed is suggested by some nutrition experts as it allows for easier digestion.

Here’s to getting more information before “flax”ing poetic about potential health benefits!

Alice!

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