



The magic of Seeds: Making America Healthy Again!

Last month we discussed how cycling of certain types of seeds could relieve PMS symptoms. This month we will explore how adding seeds to your diet can not only help with PMS symptoms, but can also improve general health and promote weight loss.

In less than 100 years Americans have transitioned from a diet consisting primarily of whole foods (seeds, nuts and berries) to a diet composed primarily of processed foods (foods altered from their original state to improve taste, convenience or shelf life). The net result of processing is a loss of nutrients, added chemicals (many of which are poorly understood) and an over abundance of sugar.

Not only do these dietary changes contribute to heart disease, diabetes and inflammatory conditions such as arthritis and fibromyalgia, they are the root cause of the obesity epidemic.

Making the transition to a diet that is rich in whole foods while minimizing our intake of processed foods is challenging. Processed foods are not only convenient, but many of us have become addicted to the added sugar in processed foods. Switching to a whole food diet seems difficult, expensive and not worth the effort.

In fact, it is worth the effort and if done one step at a time, it can be fun and rewarding. The key is to start slowly and make it simple. That's the value of seeds. They are tasty, nutritious and an easy addition to any diet.

1.



Chia Fresca: Drink your seeds: See February: “Ask the Doctor”

There are dozens of choices of seeds, but this issue of “Ask the Doctor” will focus on 4 seeds (pumpkin, sunflower, sesame and flax). Each can be easily added to any diet and each has valuable nutrients that lead to better health. There is one more important seed, the chia seed, which happens to be my favorite. Next month’s issue of “Ask the Doctor” will focus exclusively on the health benefits of adding chia seeds to your everyday diet.

No. 1: Pumpkin Seeds



I think pumpkin seeds are the ideal snack: rich in fiber, low in calories and full of nutrients.

Although, pumpkin seeds can be eaten raw, they are tastier when roasted (with or without salt added). I recommend eating the whole seed because of the extra-nutritional value and the extra boost of fiber, which makes them ideal for anyone who wants to lose pounds.

The seeds can also be eaten with the shells removed. The shelled seeds are called pepitas and are also rich in nutrients. Pepitas are a great alternative for individuals who do not like the chewiness of the seeds with the shells intact.

No. 2: Sunflower seeds



Sunflower seeds are also a rich source of nutrients and are low in carbs. They are a great snack for anyone who is trying to lose weight and reduce their intake of processed foods. The most convenient way to purchase sunflower seeds is shelled and roasted. Simply sprinkle them on your salad or eat them whole.

Some people prefer the whole seed (shell intact). I find it just too messy to eat them whole and spit out the seed, but it is a healthy alternative to eating sugar-enriched snacks.

3.

No. 3: Sesame Seeds



Sesame Seeds are often seen on the list of the world's healthiest foods. As with other seeds, it is rich in nutrients and fiber and low in carbs. They are most commonly eaten with the hull (outer shell) removed (see white seed above), but can be purchased with hull intact (black seed). The intact seed (black) has some nutritional advantage over the hulled seed, but are not as tasty according to some experts (I have never tried the black seed but plan to do so in the near future).

The white seeds add as great crunch and nutty flavor to salads. They can also be eaten straight out of the bottle, but they are so small that they tend to be messy. Another way to get the nutritional benefits is to eat hummus, which is a combination of sesame seeds and garbanzo beans. You can also use Tahini, a condiment made from toasted sesame seeds. It can be spread on bread or toast just like peanut butter.

No. 4: Flax Seeds



Flax seeds are number one on the list of beneficial seeds. They are filled with beneficial nutrients. The whole seeds are not well absorbed, and the most nutritious way to eat flax seeds is ground. You can buy whole seeds and grind them yourself with a coffee grinder or buy them already ground. The ground seeds go rancid quickly. Best to store in refrigerator or freezer (last about 6 month in freezer).

My problem with flax seeds is the taste. I find them bitter, and it is hard to disguise the unpleasant taste. I now mix them with my Chia Fresca and find it fairly easy to get 1 tablespoon a day of ground flax seed into my diet. I have patients who add them to their yogurt or oatmeal and like the taste.

Caveat:

A few caveats about eating seeds. My recommendations are for healthy people of all ages. If you have health issues, it would be best to discuss the value of adding seeds to your diet with your doctor

Is there a limit to adding seeds to your diet? I could not find a good answer to this question. One resource recommends eating 3 tablespoons of seeds or nuts per day for the average adult. My diet exceeds this recommendation by 10-fold. However, taking more than 3 tbs. per day may lead to abdominal bloating and increased gas. My recommendation is to start slowly and increase as tolerated. I also suggest you try to get as much variety in your seed intake as possible. You never know what nutrients may be hidden in any given seed that could have major health benefits.

Next month see my recipe for Chia Fresca and much more. If you have questions or suggestions, please contact us at: www.beawarefoundation.org.