

A Sprinkle of Seeds



When we think of warmer months, we often think about growth, with flowers sprouting from their seeds and the fresh produce coming back into season. Seeds are not just useful for growing beautiful flowers and delicious foods – they can also be a wonderful addition to a healthy diet!

Health Benefits of Seeds

Seeds pack a powerful punch of nutrition for their small size! They can be a great way to add fiber to your diet. Fiber is good for health in several ways: it can help us feel full and satisfied at meals, which may help us eat appropriate portion sizes; it can help us have regular bowel movements; and it can help with blood sugar and cholesterol control.

Seeds also contain healthy fats, called “unsaturated fats.” When you replace some of the less healthy fats in your diet from foods such as high fat meats, whole-fat dairy, cheeses, butter, and fried food with foods higher in unsaturated fats, it may help lower low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol levels. LDL cholesterol is known as “bad” cholesterol because when levels are too high, it contributes to fat deposits in the blood vessels. Over time, this can lead to heart disease. Some seeds contain omega-3 fatty acids. Intake of omega-3 fatty acids may help lower

triglyceride levels, which is also good for heart health. These healthy fats are great for us, but do also make seeds higher in calories. Portion size is still important to eating a healthy diet.

Seeds also provide vitamins and minerals. While the nutrient content of each seed varies, seeds in general contain vitamin E, potassium, zinc, selenium, magnesium, and iron.

Choose unsalted seeds to help reduce sodium intake if you have high blood pressure.

Who Should Not Eat Seeds?

If you have a medical condition that requires you to be on a low fiber diet (such as an active flare of Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis), whole seeds are not appropriate. Creamy sunflower seed butter or pumpkin seed butter may be ways to enjoy seeds even on a low fiber diet. If you have difficulty swallowing, whole seeds may pose a choking risk.

What about diverticulosis? Current evidence does not support the need to avoid seeds for diverticulosis. However, if you feel more comfortable doing so, just make sure you eat a wide variety of other foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and beans to help you get enough fiber.

Ways to Add Seeds to Your Diet

- Sprinkle over cereal, yogurt, or salads
- Blend in a smoothie
- Add to muffins or breads when baking
- Make chia seed pudding (see the next page)
- Grab a handful of sunflower or pumpkin seeds as a snack
- Toss in stir fry or mix into meatloaf or meatballs



Chia Seeds

These seeds are high in soluble fiber and will form a gel when soaked in water, which makes them great to thicken up overnight oats or use in pudding. They can even be used as a vegan egg substitute for baking when mixed with water (you can do this with ground flax seed too)! Chia seeds are also a plant-based source of ALA, an omega-3 fatty acid.



Flax Seeds

Like chia seeds, flax seeds are also high in fiber and provide ALA, an omega-3 fatty acid. Choose ground flax seeds instead of whole flax seeds so your body can absorb and get the benefits from these omega-3s and its vitamins and minerals. Whole flax seeds are still a source of fiber, but since we cannot digest and break them down, our body gets fewer nutrition benefits from them.



Hemp Seeds

Also called “hemp hearts” when shelled, these seeds are high in magnesium, zinc, and magnesium and a good source of iron per 3 tablespoon serving. They also contain ALA omega-3 fatty acid and vitamin E. Hemp seeds are a complete protein, which means that they contain all the amino acids our body cannot make on its own.



Sunflower Seeds

A more commonly known seed, sunflower seeds can be a great snack or topping! A suggested portion size is about 1 oz (1/4 cup) as a snack.



Pumpkin Seeds

High in magnesium and zinc, and a good source of iron, pumpkin seeds are also a great choice for snacking or adding to dishes!



Fun Fact!

Although we cook and eat quinoa like a grain (think rice or pasta), quinoa is actually a seed! It is also one of the few plants that offer a complete source of protein.

Try out a new recipe to add seeds into your diet!

Chocolate Avocado-Chia Pudding

Servings: 6

Serving Size: 1/2 cup



Ingredients:

- 2 medium ripe avocados, peeled and pitted
- 1/2 cup unsweetened almond milk
- 1/4 cup unsweetened Dutch-process cocoa powder
- 1/4 cup fat-free, plain Greek yogurt
- 3 Medjool dates (pitted)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 tablespoons chia seeds
- 1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons unsalted, chopped almonds or walnuts (optional)

Directions:

1. In a food processor or blender, process all the ingredients except the almonds until smooth.
2. Transfer the pudding to serving dishes. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour to allow the chia seeds to thicken.
3. Just before serving, sprinkle with the almonds if desired.

Nutrition Facts, Amount per 1/2 cup serving:

Calories 129; Total Fat 6.5 g; Saturated Fat 1.0 g; Cholesterol 0 mg; Sodium 22 mg; Total Carbohydrate 16 g; Dietary Fiber 5 g; Sugars 9 g; Protein 3g

Recipe Source: American Heart Association, <https://recipes.heart.org/en/recipes/chocolate-avocado-chia-pudding>

References:

1. Nutrient analyses from: <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/index.html>
 2. www.canr.msu.edu/news/consider_adding_nuts_and_seeds_to_your_diet
 3. https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/seeds_are_healthy_sources_of_fiber
- Images all sourced from: www.pixabay.com

Need a Dietitian?

Registered Dietitians are here to help you with your nutrition needs. To make an appointment call: 412-692-4497 (Oakland location) or 412-623-2421 (Shadyside location). You need a referral for “Medical Nutrition Therapy” from your doctor to schedule.