

Chia Seeds can have Health Benefits

There has been a lot in news about the health benefits of chia seeds. Chia seeds do have some great benefits. However, the science so far hasn't supported all of the advertised claims that these seeds have received.

Chia seeds are packed with nutrients. One ounce, about 2 tablespoons, offers about 18 percent of the calcium most adults need each day, 11 grams of fiber and 4 grams of protein, plus 4,900 milligrams of omega-3 fatty acids, more than what you will find in flax seeds. They are also touted to high levels of antioxidants.

Some people say chia seeds have a mild, nutty flavor; others say they are flavorless. Either way, they can be enjoyed ground or whole, sprinkled onto yogurt, cereal or salad. Chia seeds can also be used as a thickener in smoothies, soups or other foods. Chia's binding properties make its gel a possible substitute for pectin in jams and eggs in baked goods or meat and vegetable patties.

If your primary reason to try chia for weight loss, you will need to take into account the high calorie content. Two tablespoons of chia seeds have nearly 140 calories. Promoters say chia seeds help with weight loss because they expand when exposed to liquid, so like other high-fiber foods, they could help you feel full more quickly. Research actually has not always supported that claim.

A study in North Carolina conducted in 2009 followed 76 overweight participants for 12 weeks with half consuming 4 tablespoons of chia seeds a day, the other not. At the end of the study, researchers saw no difference in body mass or composition. The same study found that it also didn't have any effect on reducing blood sugar levels or promoting heart health.

Other studies have found positive effects on weight, blood glucose and triglyceride levels. Experts who have reviewed the claims the evidence for health effects is too limited.

If you are sensitive to sesame seeds or mustard seeds, you may have a similar reaction to chia. Also people who take medication for high blood pressure or blood thinner should check with a doctor before taking chia.

Source: Ohio State University Extension