

**Healthy Bytes Initiative Article**

**March 2021 Flax Seeds**

**Flax: Small Seeds with Big Benefits**

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Flax seeds, also called flaxseeds or linseeds, are small nuggets of good

nutrition. They are one of the richest sources of the essential omega-3

fatty acid, Alpha Linolenic Acid (ALA), second only to chia seeds. They

are high in lignans, dietary fiber and are a good source of protein.

Omega-3 fatty acids are anti-inflammatory and essential for brain development and function. They have been shown to reduce risk of heart disease by helping to lower blood pressure and cholesterol. Lignans are a fibrous component of plants, but unlike fiber, they have estrogen-like properties. Studies show that plant estrogens bind to receptors, blocking human estrogen and lowering risk of estrogen-receptive cancers like breast and endometrial. Flaxseeds have up to 800 times more lignans than other plant foods. Lignans also function as antioxidants protecting against aging and chronic diseases.

Flaxseeds are high in dietary fiber. Insoluble fiber helps the digestive tract to move food through quickly, reducing risk for colorectal cancers. It also acts as a prebiotic to feed the healthy microbiota. Flaxseeds are considered a rich source of soluble fiber, shown to lower cholesterol and help modulate blood sugars. Adding ground flaxseed to foods helps to lower the glycemic load.

Flaxseeds can be found in golden or brown, and in a variety of forms: whole seeds, flaxseed oil and, more recently, flaxseed non-dairy milk. They are usually consumed ground which unlocks the nutrition contained within. When buying flaxseeds, choose between whole flaxseeds and grind them at home in your coffee grinder, or ground flaxseeds which should always be purchased sealed, never in bulk. The omega-3 fats are highly susceptible to oxidation or spoilage. Once ground, those fats can rapidly deteriorate and go rancid. If you choose the convenience of ground flaxseed, take out what you need and store the remainder in the freezer until you need it again.

Ground flaxseed has a delicious, nutty flavor and works well tossed into oatmeal or on salads. Stir into soups or stews as a thickener or toss into smoothies or shakes. The soluble fiber makes it a great a substitute for egg in recipes. Mix 1 tablespoon ground flaxseed with 3 tablespoons warm water, stir and let rest for 2-3 minutes. Use in baked goods as cholesterol-free egg substitute. The beneficial omega-3 fats are not affected by heat.

Flaxseed milk is similar in Calories to skim milk with the same 8 gm of protein and 30% RDA for calcium. Flaxseed oil has had healthy fiber and lignans removed. It is usually used as an omega-3 supplement in small doses. It has a very short shelf-life so pay attention to sell-by dates and keep refrigerated after opening. Flaxseed oil should never be used for cooking but can be applied topically as a face or hand moisturizer or hair treatment.

Like other high-fiber foods, be sure to drink plenty of water when adding flaxseeds to your diet. Two tablespoons per day is a serving which can be used all at once or spread throughout the day. However you choose to enjoy flaxseeds, make them part of your daily routine for a healthy dose of essential omega-3s and fiber.