

**Healthy Bytes Initiative Article**

**Feb 2022 Chia Seeds**

**Ch-Ch-Ch-Chia for Health**

**By Stephanie Polizzi, MPH, RDN, DipACLM**

Like other seeds, chia is rich in nutrition. The combination of high protein, high fiber and antioxidants give these seeds disease-protecting capacity to lower risk for heart disease, diabetes, stroke, obesity and inflammation.

Chia seeds originated in Mexico and Guatemala and “Chian” is a Spanish word for “oily” referring to its quality unsaturated fats, particularly the essential omega-3 fat, Alpha-linolenic acid or ALA. Anywhere between 60-75% of the fat in chia seeds consists of this healthy fat. Of all foods, chia seeds contain the highest concentration of omega-3 ALA. Omega-3 intake is associated with lower risk of heart attack and stroke.

Chia seeds contain all 9 essential amino acids necessary to build protein in the body, giving chia seeds the designation of a complete protein. The advantage to using plant sources of protein, like chia seeds, is that, unlike animal-based sources like meat and dairy, chia seeds are rich in antioxidants and contain only trace amounts of saturated fat and no cholesterol.

Probably the most known benefit of consuming chia is related to its high soluble-fiber content. These fibers help to blunt blood sugar spikes, lower cholesterol, and contribute to feelings of fullness for weight management. They are also a source of food (pre-biotic) for healthy gut bacteria. Chia seeds also contain insoluble fiber, which helps relieve constipation and reduces risk of hemorrhoids, diverticulosis and colorectal cancer. Be sure to drink plenty of water when adding high-fiber foods to your diet.

Most grocery stores carry chia seeds in sealed packages. Once the package is opened, refrigerate or freeze to protect the healthy fats from oxidation. Chia seeds can be black, white or mixed. Both can be used interchangeably although white seeds may make a better flour.

Chia seeds have a mild, nutty flavor and work well in a variety of recipes. They are gluten free making them a good choice for those with Celiac disease. It is easy to use chia seeds, which can be eaten raw or cooked. Sprinkle in salads, oatmeal, pancakes or baked goods. Add to veggie sides, hummus or salad dressings. Soak chia seeds in water, non-dairy milk or other liquid to make puddings or jams.

As an egg replacer, chia seeds work whole or ground. Combine 1 Tbsp whole or 2 Tbsp ground chia seeds with 3 Tbsp water. Stir and let rest 5 minutes before adding to recipe. Use this in place of each egg in the recipe.

Many new products are showing up on the market that include chia seeds, since they are anti-allergic and have no known toxic effects. Look for chia seeds added to biscuits, pasta, cereal bars, snack, yogurt, breads, muffins and chips. However you use chia seeds, you will find them easy and delicious and you can be assured they will add valuable nutrition to your diet.