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'Tis the Season

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Seeds lower your risk of heart disease and diabetes.



Seeds are very nutritious and contain healthy fat.

'Tis the Season

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

The year-end holiday season normally exposes us to a greater abundance of nuts and seeds. Cashews, almonds, pistachios and pecans, often chocolate-coated, are all popular. But seeds also can be important. The regular use of seeds and nuts can reduce the risk of heart disease and diabetes. They are rich in phytonutrients along with healthy fat and many vitamins and minerals.

Sesame, with its rich nutty flavor, is a common ingredient in various cuisines around the world. Sesame seeds can be added to breads, bagels and buns. Sesame seeds also may be baked into crackers, snacks or cakes. Sesame seeds can be mixed with sugar, or honey and coconut, and made into sweets. Tahini (sesame seed paste) is used to make hummus and the confectionery *halvah*. Sesame is a rich source of fiber, unsaturated fat and B vitamins as well as calcium, magnesium, iron, zinc and manganese. Sesame seeds also contain a number of lignans, which protect against breast cancer.

Poppy seeds are widely used as a decoration on top of many baked goods such as breads, bagels, buns, crackers and sweet pastries, or ground and added into bread dough. They are also eaten with pasta and used in candy bars. The seeds are a rich source of calcium, iron, potassium, magnesium and phosphorus.

Chia was used by the Aztecs in ancient times as a staple food crop. The seeds can be sprinkled on cereal, added to yogurt, bread and tortillas, served alongside rice, and even soaked in fruit juice and added to desserts and smoothies. Ground chia seeds can be added to bread dough. Chia gel can be used as an egg replacer in cakes. Its rich content of fiber and omega-3 fatty acids enables chia seeds to lower the risk of heart disease and diabetes.



Chia seeds are a rich source of the B vitamins, antioxidants, and the minerals calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, manganese and zinc. Today, organic fruit-containing chia beverages and fruit chia bars providing 1000 to 2500 mg of healthy omega-3 fatty acids are gaining popularity. Drinking a beverage containing soy, nopal, chia

seed and oats daily for two months may reduce a person's triglyceride levels.

Flax seed is rich in omega-3 fatty acids and is commonly used in breakfast cereals, breads and various bakery products. Brown and golden flax seeds have similar nutritional properties. While whole flax seeds are chemically stable, ground flax seed can go rancid at room temperature in a few days. Ground flax seed needs to be placed in sealed containers and stored in the refrigerator or freezer. Flax seeds do contain a number of health-promoting polyphenolic compounds and have a good level of B vitamins. Their soluble fiber content makes them useful for lowering the risk of diabetes and heart disease. Flax seeds are especially rich in magnesium but have ample levels of calcium, iron and zinc as well.

Sunflower seeds can be added to salads and pasta to provide a nutty flavor as well as some extra nutrition. Dips, spreads and a cheese can all be made from ground sunflower seeds.

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