

Flax Seeds: A Rich Source of Omega-3's

If you are trying to restore the balance between Omega-6 and Omega-3 essential fatty acids in your diet, you may want to eat a tablespoon or two of whole flax seeds each day. Flax seeds are the richest commonly available plant source of alpha-linolenic acid (omega-3's). I recommend eating whole flax seed rather than flax seed oil because you get the whole package: the protein, fiber, minerals and phytochemicals along with the omega-3's. 100 grams of flax seed yields about:

35 grams of fat (60% omega-3 polyunsaturated, 18% monounsaturated, 10% saturated)

26 grams of protein

26 grams of fiber (14 grams insoluble, 12 grams soluble)

4 grams of minerals

9 grams of water

Flax seeds are also probably the best food source of the phytochemical lignan, (not to be confused with lignins, a type of fiber.) Flax contains 100 times the concentration of lignan as wheat bran, the next best source. This phytochemical is believed to have anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, anti-viral and anti-cancer properties. I eat whole flax seeds and count on chewing and digestion to break them down, but some will always pass through undigested. That's why if you eat them whole, the recommended amount is 2-3 tablespoons, but if you grind them up, it's only about 2 teaspoons. If you want to grind them, you can whirl them in a blender for a few seconds to break them into rough pieces, mash them with a mortar and pestle, or grind them in a spice grinder. Omega-3's are the least stable of the fatty acids, so the oil turns rancid quickly if it is exposed to heat, light or air. Grind the seeds shortly before you eat them, and store any surplus in the refrigerator. Sprinkle your seeds on cereal, into salads or any other food. They have very little flavor and just a bit of crunch. If they taste unpleasant, they're rancid and you need a new batch. A caution: you should not eat more than two to three tablespoons of raw flax seeds a day (1-2 teaspoons if ground) Flax seeds contain cyanogen which is harmless in small amounts, but in large amounts can act to keep your thyroid from taking up enough iodine. Cyanogen is rendered inactive by cooking. There have also been studies raising concern about flax seeds and prostate cancer, but there is no solid link at this time. Add some flax seeds to your healthy diet that is full of vegetables, fruits, beans, whole grains and other seeds. Don't go overboard! That applies to all foods -- don't eat huge amounts of any single food, not matter how healthful you've heard it may be. A healthful diet is a varied diet.

About the Author

Aloe Vera and Digestion, Irritable Bowel and Arthritis. Information supplied by The Aloe Vera Information Centre. Aloe Vera has been recognised.

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