Chia seeds and nutrition [1]

Dear Alice,

What are the benefits of chia seeds? How many tablespoons should I eat per day to get those benefits?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Looking for something that will help you grow as big as a ?chia pet?? Chia seeds are edible seeds that come from the desert plant *Salvia hispanica*, which is grown in Mexico and dates back to Mayan and Aztec cultures. "Chia" means strength, and folklore has it that these cultures used the tiny black and white seeds as an energy booster. Chia seeds are packed with nutrients, and therefore thought to be a healthy addition to your diet. In order to get the nutritional benefits, it is generally recommended to eat 20 grams of chia seeds (a little bit under two tablespoons), twice per day. However, the appropriate amount of chia seeds depends on several factors such as user's age, health, and several other conditions.

Chia seeds contain omega-3 fatty acids [2], carbohydrates, protein, fiber, antioxidants [3], and calcium [4]. One ounce (about two tablespoons) contains 139 calories, 4 g of protein, 9 g of fat, 12 g of carbohydrates, 11 g of fiber, plus vitamins and minerals. Chia seeds can be easily added to foods, drinks, and baked goods. They can also be mixed with water and made into a gel.

So what's all the hype? People eat chia seeds for diabetes, high blood pressure, and to reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. However, there is currently no good evidence to support chia consumption for these uses. People have also tried using chia seeds as a weight loss aid, as the high fiber content is thought to suppress appetite and ultimately help with weight loss. There's not much support for this claim. One study found that eating chia seeds had no effects on body weight, body fat, or changes in appetite over a 12-week period. However, studies have shown that a particular variety of chia seeds, marketed under Salba, can reduce certain risk factors for heart disease such as blood pressure, clotting factors, and inflammation.

With all natural supplements come precautions. If you have food allergies (especially to sesame or mustard seeds) or are on high blood pressure medications or blood thinners, ask your healthcare provider before adding chia to your diet. Also, eating chia seeds is not recommended for pregnant or breastfeeding women, as little is known about the risks. Finally,
chia seeds are high in alpha-linolenic acid, which in high doses may increase the risk of prostate cancer.

May your new seeds of knowledge grow into a happy and healthy plant!

Alice!

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