Chia Seeds – Little Seeds That Pack a Big Nutritional Punch

**By: Dr. Alyssa Musgrove**

Do not be fooled by the size of the seed, chia seeds are one of the healthiest foods on the planet. These tiny seeds are a nutritional powerhouse, providing protein, fiber, antioxidants, healthy fat, minerals and vitamins all in one low-calorie package.

You may have first heard of chia seeds from the commercial that showed us we could use them to grow a “ch-ch-ch-chia pet.” But chia seeds have been around for centuries. The ancient Aztecs and Mayans considered this food a prized possession. “Chia” is the ancient Mayan word for strength, and they valued the seed for its energy-boosting properties.

Chia seeds have similar health benefits to flax seeds, but chia seeds are not required to be ground prior to consumption. What’s more, chia seeds do not go rancid as quickly. In fact, chia seeds are said to last up to two years with no refrigeration.

Here are a few more reasons why these little seeds pack such a nutritional punch:

**Omega-3**

Two tablespoons of chia seeds contain 20% daily value of alpha-linolenic acid. (Alpha-linolenic acid cannot be produced by the body, so it is essential to get through diet and supplementation.) High concentrations of plant based omega-3 fat in chia seeds helps lower low-density lipoproteins (LDLs) and triglycerides, thereby supporting healthy cholesterol levels and cardiovascular health. The omega-3s in chia seeds can also help modulate c-reactive proteins and inflammatory cytokines to help fight widespread inflammation.

**Protein**

Chia seeds are an excellent protein source, especially for people who eat little or no animal products. Just two tablespoons of chia seed contain 5 grams of protein. Protein is the most weight-loss friendly macronutrient and can drastically reduce appetite and cravings.

**Fiber**

Research suggests a high-fiber diet can help reduce your risk for many chronic diseases. Most people need about 50 grams of fiber per 1,000 calories consumed, but most Americans do not get near this amount. Chia seeds contain about 10 grams of fiber in just two tablespoons. Fiber does not raise blood sugar and does not require insulin to be disposed. As such, chia seeds have been linked to the prevention of type 2 diabetes by normalizing insulin resistance and regulating glucose levels.

**Vitamins & Minerals**

Just two tablespoons of chia seeds provide a good portion of the daily recommended allowances of calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, manganese and zinc – all of which are essential for bone health. Gram for gram, chia seeds have a higher calcium content than most dairy products.

Chia seeds are easy to prepare. They adapt to a variety of recipes, have mild flavor, and are gluten-free. They can be eaten raw, soaked in juice or water, or added to baked goods. Chia seeds can be used as toppings to almost any dish, from smoothies to green salads. (Keep in mind that when the seeds are exposed to liquid, they take on a gelatinous texture. So, if you prefer a crunch, sprinkle them on just before eating.)

If you are looking for a healthy, gluten-free breading for fish, meat or vegetables, chia seeds can be blended with your choice of spices for an excellent breadcrumb replacement. Because of their ability to absorb both water and fat, they can be used to thicken sauces and even used as egg substitute in some recipes.

When chia seeds are soaked overnight whether in water or a nut milk, they take on a tapioca-like texture. For those who would like to begin incorporating chia seed into their diet, try these two recipes:

**Chia Pudding Parfait**

-1/3 cup chia seeds

-2 tablespoons maple syrup

-¼ tsp sea salt

-1 ½ cups almond/hemp/coconut/cashew milk

- Flavor of choice (cinnamon, vanilla, cacao powder)

- Topping of choice (chopped raw nuts, fresh berries, chopped bananas, coconut flakes,)

*Directions:*
Mix well together in a bowl the following; milk, chia seeds, maple syrup and flavor extracts of your choice. Refrigerate for at least one hour or overnight so the chia seeds absorb the moisture and become thick and gelatinous like a pudding. Spoon into a bowl, glass or parfait cup. Add your favorite toppings of nuts and fruit. Enjoy this treat morning, noon or night!

**Lemon Chia Seed Dressing**

2 tablespoons chia seeds

2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

2 tablespoons honey

2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar

¼ cup olive oil

Pinch of salt and fresh ground pepper, to taste

*Directions:*

Blend or mix all ingredients together. Taste and adjust seasonings, if desired. Add to salad, toss and serve.

\*\*If you have a history of dysphagia, chia seeds should be used with caution -- especially when consuming dry. The seeds can quickly turn into a gel ball when exposed to any liquid. If you have esophageal restrictions be careful when using them.

*Pathways to Healing specializes in holistic chiropractic care. Dr. Alyssa Musgrove draws on a variety of techniques, including chiropractic, kinesiology, nutrition, food allergy testing and lifestyle counseling to assist clients in achieving optimal health and wellness in one setting. In addition, the practice is committed to being a valuable source of information so that people can learn how to live a healthy lifestyle and prevent future illness. Pathways to Healing is located at 1022 Founders Row, Lake Oconee Village, Greensboro. The office can be reached at 706-454-2040.*