

Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Flaxseed may help to control blood pressure

My blood pressure has been inching up recently, and although I don't yet have high blood pressure, I'm on the lookout for ways to reduce it. Recently I came across some information about flaxseed and how it can help. Can you tell me more about it?

There is some evidence that flaxseed may help reduce blood pressure, but it doesn't appear to be a silver bullet.

First, good for you for taking steps to prevent high blood pressure. Normal blood pressure is 119/79 or lower. High blood pressure, or hypertension, is 140/90 or higher. It sounds like you are in the middle — somewhere between 120 and 139 for the top number and 80 to 89 for the bottom number — which is classified as "prehypertension." This is the perfect time for you to take steps to prevent high blood pressure from taking hold.

Why? Hypertension is insidious. It usually has no symptoms, but it can cause stroke, heart failure, heart attack, kidney failure and other serious health issues.

Blood pressure fluctuates from day to day, so there's no need to panic after one high reading. But if you experience several higher readings, which you might get at a doctor's office, a community health screening or a blood donation site if you're a blood donor, you should talk to your doctor. (Just a note about free blood pressure machines in grocery stores and drug stores: The cuffs may not be the right size for you or you might not use the instrument properly to get an accurate reading. It's always best to get your blood pressure taken by a trained professional.)

To prevent high blood pressure, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention encourages a



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healthy lifestyle, which means eating foods low in sodium and high in potassium, including plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables; maintaining a healthy weight; being physically active; not smoking; and limiting alcohol (no more than one drink a day for women, and no more than two for men). These are the primary recommendations for reducing the risk of hypertension. And the bonus is that they have many other health benefits, too.

Adding seeds such as flaxseed to your diet is one way to improve its quality. And studies on flaxseed have yielded intriguing results. A systematic review of 11 studies found that consuming flaxseed may very well help lower blood pressure slightly, with ground or whole flaxseed having a greater effect than flaxseed oil. The analysis, published in the *Journal of Nutrition* in April 2015, suggested the effect of flaxseed consumption was greater after about three months of eating 30 to 50 grams, or about 2 to 3 tablespoons, of flaxseed a day.

Flaxseed contains fiber, omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, and other nutrients. The high fiber content might prevent medications or supplements from being absorbed in the body, so don't eat flaxseed at the same time as you take any of these. And, like other high-fiber supplements, flaxseed can cause constipation (if not taken with plenty of water) or other gastrointestinal issues. Tell your health care providers you're trying flaxseed so they have a complete picture to help you manage your health.

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Editor: This column was reviewed by Irene Hatsu, specialist in Food Security with Ohio State University Extension.

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