



Experts remain on sidelines over chia

Some of my friends are huge fans of chia seeds. Do they really offer so many health benefits, or is it just hype?

Chia seeds do have some great properties. But unlike the seeds of Jack and the Beanstalk fame, they aren't magic, despite the enthusiasm of some vocal advocates. The science so far just hasn't supported all of the press these little seeds have received.

But first the good news. Chia seeds are packed with nutrients. One ounce, about 2 tablespoons, offers about 18 percent of the calcium most adults need per day, 11 grams of fiber and 4 grams of protein, plus 4,900 milligrams of omega-3 fatty acids — more than what you'll find in flax seed. They are also touted for their high levels of antioxidants, which are higher than even in blueberries.

Some people say chia seeds have a mild, nutty flavor; to others, they are completely flavorless. Either way, they can be used ground or whole, sprinkled onto yogurt, cereal or salad. Chia seeds can also be used as a thickener in smoothies, soups or other foods. Chia's binding properties make its gel a possible substitute for pectin in jam and eggs in baked goods or meat and vegetable patties.

But, if your primary reason to try chia is to test the product's weight loss claims, you'll need to take into account its high calorie content: Two tablespoons have nearly 140 calories. Promoters say chia seeds help with weight loss because they expand when exposed to liquid, so, like other

high-fiber foods, they could help you feel full more quickly. Although that sounds good in theory, actual research hasn't always supported the claim.

In a study published in *Nutrition Research* in 2009, researchers in North Carolina followed 76 overweight and obese participants for 12 weeks, with half consuming about 4 tablespoons of chia seeds a day and the other half getting a placebo. At the end of the study, researchers saw no difference in body mass or composition. Promoters also say chia seeds promote heart health and reduce blood sugar levels, but the same study didn't find any effect on disease risk factors.

Other studies have found positive effects on weight, blood glucose and triglyceride levels, but these studies were much smaller. Experts who have reviewed the scientific literature say that so far, the evidence for chia's health effects is too limited to make a persuasive argument either way.

It is also important to note that if you have a sensitivity to sesame or mustard seeds, you may have a similar reaction to chia. And dietitians warn that anyone who takes high blood pressure medication or blood thinners should check with a doctor before jumping on the chia bandwagon.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1043, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

OHIO AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Feb. 21, 2014

By Martha Filipic

614-292-9833

filipic.3@osu.edu

Editor:

This column was reviewed by Bridgette Kidd, registered dietitian and Healthy People program specialist for Ohio State University Extension, the outreach arm of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences.

College Communications

2021 Coffey Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1043
614-292-2011

208 Research Services
Building
1680 Madison Ave.
Wooster, OH 44691-4096
330-263-3780

Ohio State University Extension embraces human diversity and is committed to ensuring that all research and related educational programs are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to age, ancestry, color, disability, gender identity or expression, genetic information, HIV/AIDS status, military status, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status. This statement is in accordance with United States Civil Rights Laws and the USDA. Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration; Associate Dean, College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences; Director, Ohio State University Extension; and Gist Chair in Extension Education and Leadership. For Deaf and Hard of Hearing, please contact Ohio State University Extension using your preferred communication (e-mail, relay services, or video relay services). Phone 1-800-750-0750 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. EST Monday through Friday. Inform the operator to dial 614-292-6181.