

Flaxseed: Ground and whole seed, oil, and capsules

The benefits of flaxseed are significant. It has been recognized as a powerful source of many essential nutrients, especially **fiber** and **essential fatty acids**.

There is a tremendous amount of information regarding the nature of, the importance of, and the sources of fiber. We know that it helps to keep stools soft and formed, is associated with decreased risk of cardiovascular (heart/blood vessel – and brain) disease – including lowering cholesterol, and is associated with decreased risk of cancer, particularly of the bowel.

Flaxseed is consistently viewed as a significant source of **fiber**. However, in the oil form (including in capsules), the availability of fiber is lost. Fiber IS found in the original seed form.

An additional strength of flaxseed is the amount of **essential fatty acids** that it contains. Essential fatty acids (EFA) are – *essential* – especially to normal cell structure and body function. Linoleic (omega-6) and alpha-linolenic acid (omega-3) are polyunsaturated fats that are EFAs associated with nerve cells, cell membranes, and hormone-like substances associated with inflammation. Adequate amounts of EFAs (and, much like with fiber, most of us do not get adequate amounts...) are associated with prevention and healing of numerous diseases, including cardiovascular conditions, cancer, and inflammatory processes.

The use of flaxseed is highly recommended. As is often the case, the whole food is the optimal choice and is commonly available in bulk at many stores.

There are many commercial capsule and oil products available. There is a great deal of information available regarding making this choice (with the benefit of highly concentrated EFAs) with resources available via our office.

Usage

- Whole seed can be sprinkled on vegetables including in salads, on cereals, and with other grains. Chew well.
- If using ground flaxseeds, just add 1 or 2 tablespoons of to an 8-ounce glass of water and mix.
- Ground flaxseeds may produce some initial flatulence – this often improves over time or with a reduction in dose.

Cautions

- Though relatively high in fat grams, the benefit of flaxseed is felt to far outweigh such concern. Nonetheless, in addition to other lifestyle efforts (including adequate fitness), fat intake should be limited. Further, be cautious with saturated and transfatty acids and limit total dietary fat intake to 20-30 % of calories consumed (400-600 calories of fat calories per day based on a 2,000 calorie/day diet).
- To prevent ground flaxseed from swelling up and obstructing your throat or digestive tract (a relative risk with all fiber supplements, especially in individuals with throat/esophageal obstructions), drink plenty of water (at least one 8-ounce glass of water per tablespoon of ground flaxseed) along with it.
- There appear to be few if any drug or nutrient interactions with flaxseeds (or their oil). Because flaxseed may interfere with the absorption of certain medicines, however, it's a good idea to consult your doctor if you are already on medication and want to take it in any form.
- Allergic reactions to flaxseed have occurred. If you suddenly have difficulty breathing after taking the supplement, it is imperative that you get medical attention promptly.
- Flaxseed oil is also called linseed oil. The industrial types of linseed oil found in hardware stores are not for internal consumption, however. They may have poisonous additives.

Nutritional Information

<u>Portion</u>	<u>Calories</u>	<u>Fat grams</u>	<u>Fiber grams</u>	<u>Protein grams</u>
¼ cup	225	20	12-14-20 *	10

*all sources refer to “a high level of fiber in flaxseed” but documentation of the exact amount is limited and varies (3 different sources identify 3 different amounts of fiber, noted above). However, with the goal to obtain 20- 40 grams of fiber per day, flaxseed is a potent source.

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