

LIFESTYLES WITH SYLVIA



Dear Friends,

It's hard to believe I've been writing this column for a year – I guess time really does fly when you're having fun!

What brings me even greater pleasure though is the big news I have to share with you all in this, my one year anniversary column: the announcement of a very special addition to our family. Please join me in welcoming my first grandson, Cameron Philip, born March 25th, 2010. Mother and baby are doing brilliantly and Barry and I are ecstatic! As always, thank you all so much for your enthusiasm and support throughout Jessica's pregnancy – I truly feel as though I have two families, one at home and one right here at the SRC!

Also, a hearty congratulations to Deb and her entire Spinodyyssey Team, who raised a grand total of \$36,000 for breast cancer research – that money is sure to go far, and the way you all get behind this important cause each year really makes us so proud!

Finally, before we tackle the main event of this column, the importance of flaxseeds in our diet, just a quick reminder to get ready to rock and roll with the SRC staff as we prepare for another month of Spring Fever Fitness. Be sure to listen for announcements in your classes and pick up the packets we'll have for you and check out the table displays in the front lobby. As always, each week will be devoted to a different fitness topic, with master classes and lectures to educate and inspire you. I encourage you all to get involved and benefit from this fitness jumpstart, just in time to welcome the warmer weather!

First Things First: What Are Flaxseeds Anyway?

Before you can really understand the benefits of flaxseeds, you probably want to know what they are in the first place, right?

Flaxseeds are the most concentrated plant source of alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), an omega-3 fatty acid (omega-3 fatty acids are heart-healthy nutrients that are also well-known for their anti-inflammatory properties). ALA has numerous benefits such as being a form of energy and a fatty acid essential for proper skin function. Additionally, ALA is the precursor to eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), the acclaimed fatty acids found in fish.

Flaxseeds and Heart Health

While small in size, flaxseeds have big benefits for heart health. Studies have found that diets rich in ALA are associated with lower risks of heart disease and cardiac arrest. Individuals who followed ALA-rich diets have also been found to have lower total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol and triglycerides as well as reduced hypertension. To top it all off, flaxseeds are also a good source of folate, vitamin B6 and magnesium, three other nutrients vital for heart health.

Flaxseeds and Digestive Health

While their heart health benefits alone should be enough for you to add flaxseeds to your diet, they also happen to be just as good for your digestive system, too!

Flaxseeds are a very good source of dietary fiber, both insoluble and soluble. The insoluble fiber is mostly lignin which benefits gastrointestinal health, and the soluble fiber is mostly mucilage which benefits cholesterol levels and blood sugar balance and also promotes the growth of intestinal “good flora.” Plus, flaxseeds have been found to have a laxative effect, decreasing symptoms of constipation and increasing frequency of bowel movements.

Flaxseeds and Women’s Health

For us women, flaxseeds can be especially beneficial. Flaxseeds are a concentrated source of special lignan phytoestrogens, phytonutrients that are converted by the aforementioned intestinal “good flora” into two hormone-like substances called enterolactone and enterdiol. These hormone-like agents demonstrate a number of protective effects against breast cancer and are also believed to be one reason that a vegetarian diet is associated with a lower risk for breast cancer.

Flaxseeds 101

Now that you know why you should add flaxseeds to your diet, you’re probably wondering how you can go about doing it. After all, chances are most of you haven’t even *seen* a flaxseed before!

With that in mind, here’s a short primer on purchasing, storing and preparing flaxseeds:

Step #1: Purchasing Flaxseeds

Flaxseeds are slightly larger than sesame seeds, have a hard shell which is smooth and shiny and a color that ranges from deep amber to reddish brown. They are available year-round in prepackaged containers as well as bulk bins (you can also purchase flaxseed meal or flaxseed oil).

While flaxseeds can be purchased pre-ground, I always prefer to buy whole flaxseeds and grind them at home as I need them since whole seeds have a longer shelf life than those that are pre-ground. Finally, it should come as no surprise that I recommend selecting organically grown flaxseeds whenever possible.

Step #2: Storing Flaxseeds

Whole flaxseeds should be stored in an airtight container in a dark, dry and cool place (ideally, the refrigerator) where they will keep fresh for three months. Flaxseeds stored in the freezer will keep for six months.

Step #3: Preparing Flaxseeds

In order to derive the benefits of flaxseeds, always grind them before serving – grinding breaks the hard shells and allows for the digestion and absorption of their nutrients.

Whole shelled flaxseeds can be ground in a common coffee grinder. I suggest you purchase a separate grinder to dedicate to flaxseeds, but if you decide to use your coffee grinder, be sure to clean it both before and after grinding seeds.

Ten Simple Flaxseed Serving Ideas

Still not sold on flaxseeds? Consider this: the famous emperor Charlemagne was so impressed with the versatility of flax that he passed laws requiring both its cultivation and consumption!

True, consuming flaxseeds may not be a law these days, but adding flaxseeds to your diet certainly couldn't be any easier – to get started, try these quick and easy, not to mention delicious, suggestions:

1. Sprinkle ground flaxseeds on your morning fruit or cereal.
2. Add ground flaxseeds to your morning smoothie.
3. Add one tablespoon ground flaxseed to green salads.
4. Sprinkle ground flaxseeds on top of cooked vegetable to add a nutty flavor.
5. Spread peanut butter on apple slices and dip them in ground flaxseeds
6. Fill celery ribs with peanut butter and dip them in ground flaxseeds.
7. Make a fruit “sundae”: top a bowl of fruit salad with cottage cheese, ground flaxseeds, maple syrup and a sprinkling of cinnamon.
8. Make your favorite dressing using flaxseed oil.
9. Add ground flaxseeds to granola.
10. Add ground flaxseeds to yogurt.

Additionally, adding the earthy, slightly nutty flavor of flaxseeds to cereals, baked goods and other recipes is a great way to enjoy them while reaping all the benefits of their health promoting qualities.

Like what you read? Let me hear from you by emailing me at Sylviae9@aol.com!

Until next time, happy healthful eating,

Sylvia

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