

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Benefits of Barley

Other than in its alcoholic form (beer), how long has it been since barley entered your mouth? If you're like most of us, it's been too long, 'way too long. It's been cultivated for at least 10,000 years. For hundreds, if not thousands of years, barley was the major grain for humankind. We know because the grain, and beer residues, have been found in ancient pots from Babylonia! But now it's not the archeologists who are most interested in barley, it's the doctors and nutritionists. Barley is not a new 'miracle food', it's an ancient one.

Okay, you may ask, why's barley so good for me if it's not in beer? There are several big answers to that question. One is "Cholesterol". Barley (along with oats) has the FDA approval to say it can help get our cholesterol levels down to healthy. After all the holiday indulging, your heart and arteries may need a break!

The main 'secret' ingredient in barley is fiber. Fiber comes in two main types – soluble and insoluble. Barley has both. There are several kinds of soluble fiber. Barley has at least two of them, plus the insoluble fiber. They all do different things for us.

Soluble barley fiber is particularly sticky. It dissolves in water, or in our stomachs, and makes a big soft, sticky 'sponge'. As the sponge moves along the intestines it grabs cholesterol from our meal. We can't absorb it, so out it goes. It also grabs bile acids that are made from cholesterol and carries them out too. If we keep eating barley more and more gets carried out, and our cholesterol levels go down. The estimates are that by eating barley or oats 3 times a day your blood cholesterol levels could go down by as much as 5%. That costs less than pills!

Both kinds of fiber seem to help keep us feeling full longer. That's good because then we tend to eat less. That helps manage our weight. And extra weight is a big problem in American health these days. But besides just managing weight in general, at least one medical study found that barley somehow picks on the fat around our middles to reduce. It's this fat, packed around our intestines, our liver, our kidneys, that has the biggest effect on our health. And precisely because it's packed around those organs, the fat around our middles is what is most associated with higher risk of

diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and more. So anything that helps get rid of some of those fat cells shoving on our livers and kidneys is going to be good.

One last benefit from barley is that all that fiber helps the good bacteria in our guts grow. Good gut bacteria help keep our intestines and colons healthy, protected from cancers. They might also help manage cholesterol and keep our arteries strong.

Are you sure you don't want another serving of barley?

Besides what it helps take away, barley also gives. It gives us copper for our enzymes. Selenium, also in barley, helps to protect us from mercury. It's necessary for some of our enzymes as well. Plants are not particularly good sources of iron, for our blood, but barley does have some iron for us. It has zinc too. Among other jobs, zinc is important for our sense of taste, and for sexual development especially in men. The potassium from barley helps keep our blood pressure under control. And the B vitamins help all through our bodies for many, many jobs.

Now that you're ready to go buy some, look for quick barley. It cooks in 10 minutes, not the hour that regular barley does. Pearled barley is whiter, for those who don't care for whole grains. It's missing the insoluble fiber from the hull, but it does still have most of its soluble fiber. You can substitute barley for rice in many recipes, from soups to puddings. Any way you cook it, barley will be slightly chewier than rice. It's good in stuffing and pilafs, casseroles and salads.

This makes a light supper or lunch main dish. And since strawberry season is opening now, you'll have the freshest berries around to include. Enjoy!

Barley, Berries and Chicken Salad

2 cups cooked barley	1½ cups cooked, cubed chicken
1 can (8 ounces) sliced water chestnuts	½ cup sliced celery
¼ cup sliced green onions	½ cup prepared Italian salad dressing
1 cup sliced fresh strawberries	

Cook barley according to package directions, without adding salt. Drain water chestnuts. Combine cooked barley, chicken, water chestnuts, celery and onions. Drizzle salad dressing over barley-chicken mixture and toss with fork. Chill well. To serve, spoon chilled salad into serving bowl and top with sliced strawberries. Toss lightly to mix. Serves 4.

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