

PENNY SAVER NEWS

May 30, 2013

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

e-mail: mkeith@ufl.edu

Eat Seedy

Seedy clothes are not the best, but a seedy diet is very healthy. Birds love seeds, and so do rats. If we humans ate more of them we'd probably be healthier. Of course, how we prepare them does make a difference, but look at all the options we have! Seeds include everything from wheat, rice and corn to beans and peas, from peanuts and walnuts to mustard and peppercorns. A coconut is a pretty big seed, poppy seeds are pretty tiny.

Some we eat for flavor. Can you imagine what our dinners would taste like without pepper, mustard, fennel, sesame or cumin? No Italian, no Mexican, no Chinese - meals would be pretty boring. They have such strong flavors that we need just a little bit in a meal. Often toasting these spice seeds makes them even more flavorful. Toasted sesame seeds and the oil made from them have a flavor and aroma that is not only stronger but different from the untoasted seeds. Many curry recipes start by asking us to toast the mustard seeds until they start popping. That brings out their flavor. You can toast seeds in a dry skillet or a hot oven. Stir frequently so that they brown evenly, and watch carefully so you can grab them off the heat before they start to scorch.

We usually put some seeds in the grain category - wheat, corn and rice. These seeds have so much starch stored as energy for the new little plant that we harvest them for ourselves. The starch is protected inside the grain by a fiber covering. That's the bran. Whole grains also have protein, and some have oil as well. When we eat the whole grain, with its fiber, protein and fat, the starch is digested fairly slowly. It doesn't raise our blood sugar as fast as plain, refined starch.

The fat in seeds is usually oil, a liquid at room temperature. Many seeds have very healthy oils, the kinds that don't affect our hearts or cholesterol levels. A few such as coconut and palm oils have higher amounts of saturated fats which we would be better off limiting. Some seeds such as soy, sunflower and canola are raised specifically because they make so much oil. We use more sunflower oil than we eat sunflower seeds. But all those peanuts add a lot of calories with their oil, so go easy!

A few seeds, some newcomers to our tables, have less common fats. Flax seed is known for its omega-3 oils. The ALA oil of flax is unsaturated, but it's not the kind that has the most benefit for your heart. Soybeans and a few others make plant sterols. These are similar to cholesterol from animals, but are very helpful. They plug up the paths that our bodies use to absorb cholesterol, so if we have these in our meal we don't get all the cholesterol. They can be so useful for lowering cholesterol that a few margarines and juices are fortified with plant sterols just for that purpose.

Protein is the other nutrient that seeds have for us. Again, some seeds have much more than others. Soy is very high in protein. But so are many nuts, including almonds and walnuts, and legumes that include beans, lentils and peanuts. People who choose a vegetarian or vegan diet depend on seeds for most of their protein.

What else is left? Fiber! Most seeds have lots of fiber. Whole grains have more than white rice or wheat flour. Beans are real stars when it comes to fiber. They have several kinds of fiber too, some that helps our intestines and some that helps bring down cholesterol. Even things like mustard seeds have fiber, but we don't eat enough of that to count the fiber!

And of course, seeds in all their variety are great sources of many vitamins and minerals. Some help balance sodium to keep our blood pressure down. Some are antioxidants. Some keep our bones, brains, muscles and skin in good shape. Add more seeds to your diet, to keep yourself in shape!

Here's a way to use a less-familiar but very healthy seed - barley. It helps lower cholesterol and manage blood sugar. But it'll help cut your food bills too. It's inexpensive and filling. Be sure to get QUICK barley, the regular will take much longer to cook. Serve as side dish as you would serve rice.

Barley-Almond Casserole

4 Tbsp margarine (1/2 stick)	1 cup quick barley
1 onion, chopped	2 cups chicken broth, reduced sodium
1 (5-oz) can water chestnuts	1 (3-oz) can sliced mushrooms
½ cup slivered almonds	1 envelope onion soup mix

Preheat oven to 350° F. Drain water chestnuts and mushrooms. Chop chestnuts. Melt margarine in saucepan and stir in barley and onion. Sauté until onions are tender and barely brown. Add rest of ingredients and mix well. Spoon into 2-qt baking dish. Cover and bake 1 hour. Add more broth if it gets too dry. Serves 6.

Hillsborough County Extension is a cooperative service of Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners and the University of Florida.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Employment Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M., University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating.