

Are You Getting Your Oats?

Oats are another one of life's superfoods - naturally rich in soluble and insoluble fibre, B vitamins, calcium, potassium, protein and magnesium and naturally low in sugar, fat and salt.

Fibre helps to counter constipation by increasing the water holding capacity of waste material in the bowel and stimulates the muscular contractions that move waste material along the intestine. This results in softer stools that are easier to pass. It follows then, that a higher fibre intake needs to be accompanied by an adequate sugar-free fluid intake.

A diet low in fibre is associated with diverticular disease and bowel cancer. Increasing evidence suggests that eating a diet rich in fibre has a protective effect.

Oats have a positive effect on blood glucose levels. Porridge has a low Glycaemic Index meaning that they are absorbed into the bloodstream more slowly helping to keep blood sugar levels stable - and you also feel fuller for longer.

Oats are one of the richest sources of beta-glucan, a type of soluble fibre that has been proven to lower levels of bad (LDL) cholesterol in the blood. It does this by stimulating the secretion of bile acids (which contain cholesterol) into the digestive tract. This results in a loss of cholesterol from the body and there is less chance that cholesterol will be deposited in the arteries.

Oat based breakfast cereals such as porridge and muesli have also been shown to lower blood pressure in people who are hypertensive.

Ways to incorporate oats into your diet:

- Porridge made with water or skimmed milk – try adding prunes, dates or other dried fruit to give a sweet fruity twist; sunflower and pumpkin seeds give a nutty flavour.
- No added sugar/salt muesli (make your own so you know exactly what the ingredients are. Try a combination of oats, barley, rye and wheat flakes, nuts, seeds and dried fruits).
- Combine rolled oats with wholemeal flour to make a fibre-rich fruit crumble topping.
- Add oats to a banana or mango smoothie to give a creamy texture.

Some baked goods such as biscuits, cakes, cereal bars and flapjacks contain oats but also tend to be high in calories, fat and sugar and are best avoided.

All-in-all, oats are beneficial in helping to reduce bad cholesterol in the blood and lower blood pressure, both of which are known to increase the risk of developing coronary heart disease. In addition they help to avoid constipation and keep the gut and bowels healthy.