

Real Foods that Heal
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Oats, good and good for you

As I look back over the contents of Real Foods That Heal since January of this year, I realize that not a single bulletin has been devoted to a grain product. It's important to talk about the reasons for that, lest I leave the impression that I am "carb-phobic." I have purposely emphasized vegetables, fruits, legumes, and fish because these are typically under-consumed in the standard American diet, and grains are consumed in excess by most Americans. But that gross generalization does not do justice to grains, specifically whole grains. So while I generally think we would benefit from decreasing the consumption of processed grains (i.e. bread and baked goods), we need to increase the amount of whole grains we enjoy. Here are some good reasons why.

As a group, people who eat higher quantities of whole grains have a decreased risk of cardiovascular disease and a decreased risk of cancer. But let's name specific foods, because no-one goes to the grocery with "whole grains" on the list. How about "oats" on your shopping list? Oats are a good choice because they are rich in the soluble fiber beta-glucan. Soluble fiber has special medical benefits that insoluble fiber does not have. Insoluble fiber (like wheat bran) is good for intestinal health and regularity but it does not have any claim to prevention of diabetes and heart disease like soluble fiber. The soluble fiber in oats can reduce LDL cholesterol and risk of heart disease, and makes insulin resistance and diabetes less likely. Now we know also that soluble fiber aids the health of colon lining cells and helps them resist changes leading to cancer. It's hard to imagine a better 3 for 1 benefit: a food that decreases risk of heart disease, diabetes, and colon cancer. Now what do you look for at the grocery?

Ideally, look for "just oats." Not oats in a list of ingredients on a processed baked food, certainly not a flashy advertisement on the front of a box making a health claim based on oat content. But good old-fashioned rolled oats or steel cut oats, something that takes at least 5 minutes to cook. The less "instant" and less processed they are, the lower the glycemic index and the less the food will elevate blood sugar. You will stay full longer this way, have less craving for sweets later in the day, and will know you are benefiting from the whole food. You can use it as a cooked breakfast cereal or add it to recipes. Finally, if you are cooking oatmeal, look at the experience in a new way, and consider how good it can really taste without all that sugar you used to put on top! Add fruit, nuts, and maybe a little soy milk instead. I'm feeling warmer already!

Make your own granola!

Take about a cup of chopped nuts, a mixture of your liking including almonds and walnuts for omega-3 content, and toast them about 10 minutes in a 375 degree oven. Set these aside, then in a shallow baking dish spread a mix of 4 cups of rolled oats and a ¼ cup of sunflower or pumpkin seeds (hulled). In a glass container mix together 8 tbsp of organic cold pressed canola oil, 1/3 cup of maple syrup and ¼ tsp salt, then drizzle over the oats. Stir together then spread evenly in the baking dish, and bake 30 minutes at 300 degrees, stirring once in the middle. Remove from heat and let cool before mixing in the reserved nuts; store in a sealed glass container for up to a month before consuming. Optional: stir in dried fruit such as raisins or dates before placing in storage jars. Makes a great instant breakfast which is much better than anything you can buy in a box!

To your health,

Robert Pendergrast, M.D.

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