

Why you should eat chia seeds

Chia seeds are a versatile food that can be used in your diet in many ways without sacrificing taste, texture or flavour.

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Chia seeds have become a popular food. They are not only easy to digest but are also a versatile ingredient that you can easily add to any recipe.

Their health benefits include promoting a healthy skin and reducing signs of aging, supporting the heart and digestive system and building stronger bones.

Joshua Ssozi, a nutritionist at Makerere Department of Food and Health Sciences, says the best way to access their vitamins and minerals is to either grind or soak them. "Soak chia seeds in an equal amount of water and let them sit for about 30 minutes to two hours to enable you get a thick gel," he says adding that if you do not to soak them, they can also absorb water from you during digestion.

Skin and hair care

Ssozi says chia seeds contain high levels of zinc, a vital component in the formation of collagen, which strengthens the muscle tissue, hair, and skin. Zinc also helps damaged tissues in the body to repair.

"The seeds contain

a number of antioxidants which stop free radical activity and speed up the skin's repair systems and prevent further damage. Taking chia seeds can prevent premature skin aging due to inflammation and free radical damage," he says.

Digestive health and metabolism

According to Ssozi, being high in dietary fibre, chia seeds benefit bowel regularity by adding bulk to the stool. They also improve cellular growth, mobility and boost metabolic function. "Chia seeds are rich in fibre, which is an important element in healthy digestion. It bulks up bowel movements and stimulates peristaltic motion as food moves through the intestines smoothly. This reduces the risk of constipation and diarrhoea," he says.

Heart health and diabetes

Their ability to reverse inflammation, regulate cholesterol and lower blood pressure makes them extremely beneficial to heart health, says Lilian Nyanzi, a nutritionist at Neulife Medical Centre, Bweyogerere.

"They will help you ward off cancer, coronary heart disease, heart attack, hormonal disorders, hyperlipidemia, hypertension, stroke, and vasodilatation," she says, adding that chia seeds are

high in alpha-linolenic acid and fibre, which is essential for your body's ability to balance insulin levels that also regulate the amount of sugar in the body.

"Fibre neither raises blood sugar nor requires insulin to be disposed of, thereby boosting your heart health and keeping your diabetes at check," Nyanzi adds.

Stronger bones and muscles

Calcium is fundamental in bone health and helps maintain bone strength and mass. It is, therefore, recommendable for one to take calcium every day. Incorporating chia seeds into your daily meals will help in achieving the amount of calcium your body needs.

"Chia seeds also contain boron, another essential nutrient for bone health. It helps metabolise calcium, magnesium, manganese and phosphorus for healthy growth of bones and strong muscles," Nyanzi says.

Dental health

Chia seeds are packed with calcium, vitamin A, phosphorus and zinc. These are healthy nutrients for strong and healthy teeth.

Ssozi says, "Zinc prevents the buildup of plaque on teeth by preventing it from mineralising onto your teeth. They also have an antibacterial effect that keeps bacteria away. Vitamin A and phosphorus are also important for strong teeth and oral health."

Nyanzi says thanks to their recent surge in popularity, you can find chia seeds at many supermarkets and most health food stores. A small tin will cost you between Shs5,000 and Shs10,000.

REFILL NUTRIENTS

During pregnancy, a mother's body gets depleted of most of the nutrients and chia seeds become handy in replacing some of the lost nutrients. Iron, present in chia seeds is essential in the development of red blood cells that transport oxygen around the body. Lilian Nyanzi, a nutritionist at Neulife Medical Centre, Bweyogerere, says during the final trimester of pregnancy, it is important to get adequate calcium for proper skeletal development. Chia seeds contain almost five times the amount of calcium as milk and an added bonus of boron, a critical mineral for bone health.

