Hemp Seed—Super Food

Essential Amino Acids, Fatty Acids and Protein

Mention the word hemp and most people will stare blankly, conjure up images of thick rope or wonder if they should turn you in to the police. Although the hemp plant is a member of the cannabis sativa family, and therefore a cousin of marijuana, the two plants are different. The hemp plant, which has existed for centuries and is used commercially to make paper, textiles and biodegradable plastics, is being rediscovered for its high nutritional value.

Regardless of its renegade family alliance, hemp seed has emerged as a protein-rich powerhouse, containing all of the essential amino acids, and a perfect ratio of essential fatty acids (EFA). Hemp seed and hemp oil offer an omega-6/omega-3 ratio of 3:1 which exceeds the targeted ratio of 4:1. EFAs are necessary for cell growth and healthy circulation and help boost the immune system. Two tablespoons of hemp seed contain five grams of protein, two grams of fiber, and six grams of fat (essential fatty acids), equaling about 90 calories.

Hemp seeds are also a great source of dietary fiber, magnesium, iron, zinc and potassium, and they don't contain phytic acid, making them easily digestible. Most seeds, grains and legumes contain phytic acid, a substance which reduces the absorption of minerals such as iron, calcium, zinc and magnesium. Sprouting seeds, beans and grains can help reduce the amount of phytic acid, and beans soaked overnight in warm water prior to cooking will also reduce phytic acid, allowing for greater absorption of essential minerals.

The hulled seed, referred to as the hemp nut, has a sweet, nutty flavor and is currently available in many forms for the consumer. Uncooked, the hemp nut can be added to morning cereal, an afternoon protein shake or baked into meatloaf, bread, pancakes, cookies or muffins. Hemp nut flour is also available. Hemp oil is delicious on salads, drizzled over raw or cooked vegetables, and can be used for cooking on low heat.

The hemp nut is also found in many commercial cereals, bars, breads, chips and pasta in most grocery stores.

Several hemp seed cookbooks are available online and in bookstores.

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