

Leave them feeling full with nutritious chia seeds

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Pity the chia seed. For so long this nutritional powerhouse was relegated to late-night television commercials hawking sprouting cat-shaped clay planters.

That is, until recently. Americans have suddenly realized chia seeds have a lot to offer a healthy diet. A tiny tablespoon of chia seeds crams in tons of protein, fiber, healthy fats, calcium, iron, manganese, phosphorus, and omega fatty acids. That's a lot to offer in a little seed.

But the real reason I love chia so much? It fills me up, and that keeps me from getting hungry (and cranky) and grabbing the wrong kind of snack later in the day. That's because when soaked in a liquid, chia seeds expand. They also release natural thickeners, creating a pudding-like mixture.

Another bonus is that chia seeds are shelf-stable. That means I can buy them in large quantities in bulk or on sale, and that makes the budgeter in me happy.

Not sure what to do with chia seeds? Here are some easy ideas:

Very trendy right now is chia pudding. Just mix 2 tablespoons of chia seeds with 2/3 cup dairy milk or milk alternative and let sit in the refrigerator overnight. By morning it will be thick and rich, perfect for topping with fruit and nuts for a healthy breakfast, snack or dessert.

You also can use the seeds as-is sprinkled on almost anything - salads, granola, yogurt, rice. The crunch they add is great.

Similar to the pudding, you can make a chia "gel," which can be stirred into sauces, dips, or salad dressings to lend a more satisfying texture to otherwise lean items. To make a gel, mix 1 tablespoon of seeds with a 1/2 cup of water (or other liquid, such as coconut water) and let sit for 20 minutes. Chia gel even can be substituted for some of the fat in baking recipes.

Ground chia seeds can be swapped for part of the flour in many recipes. Or stir chia seeds into thawed frozen fruit and let sit 20 minutes and you'll have a sauce for ice cream, yogurt or cake.

Perhaps my favorite use of chia, especially for hectic school mornings, is boosting the fiber and protein of a smoothie. You'll be impressed by the staying power chia seeds give a simple smoothie. But only add the seeds at the end. Blending them in too soon will produce a gelatinous and unappealing texture.

STRAWBERRY-BANANA-CHIA BREAKFAST SMOOTHIE

Start to finish: 10 minutes Servings: 2

- 1 1/2 cups low-fat milk, divided
- 2 tablespoons chia seeds
- 1 cup fresh or frozen strawberries, sliced
- 1 banana, frozen and cut into slices or chunks
- 1 cup plain low-fat Greek yogurt
- 1 to 2 teaspoons honey or maple syrup (optional)
- 1 cup ice cubes



In a small cup or bowl, use a fork to stir together 1/2 cup of milk and the chia seeds. Set aside for 5 minutes while you prepare the smoothie.

In a blender, combine the remaining milk, strawberries, banana, yogurt, honey or maple syrup (if using) and the ice cubes. Blend on high until creamy and smooth, 30 to 60 seconds.

Stir the chia seed and milk mixture to break up any clumps, then add to the blender and pulse on low once for 1 to 2 seconds, or just until the chia seeds mix into the smoothie, but before they are blended. Divide between 2 glasses and serve. If you want the chia seeds to plump up more, let the smoothies sit for 5 minutes before drinking.