

Flax Oil Benefits



A rich source of healing oil, flaxseed has been cultivated for more than 7000 years. First cultivated in Europe, the plant's brown seeds were regularly used to prepare balms for inflamed skin and healing slurries for constipation. Rich in essential fatty acids, or EFAs, flaxseed oil is used to prevent and treat heart disease and to relieve a variety of inflammatory disorders and hormone-related problems, including infertility.

Today, flaxseeds (also called linseeds) are best known for the therapeutic oil that is derived by pressing them. Rich in essential fatty acids, or EFAs, flaxseed oil has earned a solid reputation for treating a range of ailments, from heart disease to lupus.

The essential fatty acids in flaxseed oil are its key healing components. EFAs are particularly valuable because the body needs them to function properly, but can't manufacture them on its own. Essential fatty acids work throughout the body to protect cell membranes, keeping them efficient at admitting healthy substances while barring damaging ones.

One of the EFAs in flaxseed oil, alpha-linolenic acid, is known as an omega-3 fatty acid. Like the omega-3s found in fish, it appears to reduce the risk of heart disease and numerous other ailments.

Flaxseed oil is an excellent source of omega-3s: Just 1 teaspoon contains about 2.5 grams, equivalent to more than twice the amount most people get through their diets. Flaxseeds also contain omega-6 fatty acids in the form of linoleic acid; omega-6s are the same healthy fats found in vegetable oils.

In addition, flaxseeds are a rich source of lignans, substances that appear to positively affect hormone-related problems. Lignans may also be useful in preventing certain cancers and combating specific bacteria, fungi, and viruses, including those that cause cold sores and shingles.

Specifically, flaxseed oil may help to:

Lower cholesterol, protect against heart disease and control high blood pressure: Several studies indicate that flaxseed oil, as well as ground flaxseeds, can lower cholesterol, thereby significantly reducing the risk of heart disease. Taking flaxseed oil may also protect against angina (chest pain) and high blood pressure. In addition, a five-year study done recently at Boston's Simmons College found that flaxseed oil may be useful in preventing a second heart attack. It may also help prevent elevated blood pressure by inhibiting inflammatory reactions that cause artery-hardening plaque and poor circulation.

Counter inflammation associated with gout, lupus and fibrocystic breasts: Omega-3 fatty acids appear to limit the inflammatory reaction associated with these conditions. In cases of lupus, flaxseed oil not only reduces inflammation in the joints, skin and kidneys, but also lowers cholesterol levels that may be elevated by the disease. Taking flaxseed oil for gout may lessen the often sudden and severe joint pain or swelling that is a symptom of this condition. In addition, the ability of omega-3 fatty acids to boost the absorption of iodine--a mineral often found in low levels in women suffering from fibrocystic breasts--makes flaxseed oil potentially valuable for treating this often painful condition.

Control constipation, haemorrhoids, diverticular disorders and gallstones: Because they are high in dietary fibre, ground flaxseeds can help ease the passage of stools and thus relieve constipation, haemorrhoids and diverticular disease. In those with diverticular disease, flaxseeds may also keep intestinal pouches free of waste and thus keep potential infection at bay. Taken for inflammatory bowel disease, flaxseed oil can help to calm inflammation and repair any intestinal tract damage. In addition, the oil may prevent painful gallstones from developing and even dissolve existing stones.

Treat acne, eczema, psoriasis, sunburn and rosacea: The essential fatty acids in flaxseed oil are largely responsible for its skin-healing powers. Red, itchy patches of eczema, psoriasis and rosacea often respond to the EFA's anti-inflammatory actions and overall skin-soothing properties. Sunburned skin may heal faster when treated with the oil as well. In cases of acne, the EFAs encourage thinning of the oily sebum that clogs pores.

Promote healthy hair and nails: The abundant omega-3 fatty acids in flaxseed oil have been shown to contribute to healthy hair growth (in fact, low levels of these acids may cause dry and lackluster locks). Hair problems exacerbated by psoriasis or eczema of the scalp may respond to the skin-revitalizing and anti-inflammatory actions of flaxseed oil as well. Similarly, the oil's EFAs work to nourish dry or brittle nails, stopping them from cracking or splitting.

Minimise nerve damage that causes numbness and tingling as well as other disorders: The EFAs in flaxseed oil assist in the transmission of nerve impulses, making the oil potentially valuable in treating conditions of numbness and tingling. The oil's nerve-nourishing actions may also help in the treatment of Parkinson's disease, a degenerative disorder of the nervous system, and protect against the nerve damage associated with diabetes and multiple sclerosis.

Reduce cancer risk and guard against the effects of ageing: The lignans in flaxseed oil appear to play a role in protecting against breast, colon, prostate, and perhaps skin cancer. Although further studies are needed, research undertaken at the University of Toronto indicates that women with breast cancer, regardless of the degree of cancer invasiveness, may benefit from treatment with flaxseed oil. Interestingly, the oil's lignans may protect against various effects of ageing as well.

Treat menopausal symptoms, menstrual cramps, female infertility and endometriosis: Because the hormone-balancing lignans and plant estrogens (phytoestrogens) in flaxseed oil help stabilise a woman's estrogen-progesterone ratio, they can have beneficial effects on the menstrual cycle, and relieve the hot flashes of perimenopause and menopause. Flaxseed oil may also improve uterine function and thus treat fertility problems. In addition, the essential fatty acids in flaxseed oil have been shown to block production of prostaglandins, hormonelike substances that, when released in excess amounts during menstruation, can cause the heavy bleeding associated with endometriosis.

Fight prostate problems, male infertility and impotence: The EFAs in flaxseed oil may help to prevent swelling and inflammation of the prostate, the small gland located below the bladder in males that tends to enlarge with age. Symptoms of such enlargement, such as urgency to urinate, may lessen as a result. The EFAs also play a role in keeping sperm healthy, which may be of value in treating male infertility, and they can improve blood flow to the penis, a boon for those suffering from impotence.

Properties:

Analgesic, anti-estrogenic, anti-inflammatory, cardiogenic, demulcent, emollient, expectorant, laxative, nervine, pectoral, purgative, resolvent.

Indicated for:

Acne, ageing, angina, arthritis and joint inflammation, back pain, bacteria, fungi, and viruses, cancer prevention, cataracts, chronic pain, cold sores, constipation, Crohn's disease, diverticular disorders, eczema, endometriosis, fatigue, gallstones, gout, hair problems, heart disease prevention, haemorrhoids, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and clogged arteries, impotence, infertility (male & female), kidney stones, lupus, menopause, multiple sclerosis, nail problems, osteoporosis, parkinson's disease, perimenopause, prostate problems, psoriasis, rosacea, shingles, skin health, stroke, sunburn.