Oats For Winter Wellness

Just as oats thrive in cold, damp climates, they will help you thrive through the long Canadian winters. These hardy grains are certainly more versatile than simply breakfast food. For November, I have chosen to surprise you with a variety of tasty oat recipes. Quick and easy to prepare, these oat meals (no pun intended) will be loved by kids and adults alike.

One of our most nutritious cereals, oats are also one of the most complete foods for humans. The grains are nutritional powerhouses, loaded with minerals, silica and other trace elements our body needs to build strong bones and muscles and to maintain joint elasticity.

Of all grains, oats contain the highest amount of protein. They also contain all the B vitamins, including traces of B12 in a density found in no other food. Oats are rich in vitamin E and contain seven per cent essential fatty acids and trace amounts of vitamin K. They are also the only cereal containing saponin, a hormone-like substance that helps the pancreas regulate insulin production. This benefits diabetics immensely. For people avoiding wheat, oats make an ideal substitute.

Oats are easy to digest. They provide energy and give you beautiful skin. It is said that oats encourage growth because of the ideal composition of protein, fat and carbohydrates. For this reason babies should be introduced to oats as the first solid food after they are weaned. To start, cook the oats, then strain and feed the oat/water solution in a bottle to baby. Later the baby will love oats as porridge.

As soothing food for those with digestive problems, nutrition for the convalescent and energy for the strenuous hard worker, oats are an essential health food for the winter months and beyond.

Healthfully,
Christel Gursche
Classic Bircher Muesli
Oats are excellent for upset stomachs and over-stressed nerves, providing an abundance of minerals, vitamins, mucilage and fat. In-season berries or sliced bananas instead of apples also work well in this recipe.
Serves four generously.

2 cups (500 ml) oat flakes (rolled oats)
1 1/2 cups (375 ml) milk, nut milk or soy milk
1/2 cup (125 ml) raisins (optional)
2 apples, grated
2 Tbsp (30 ml) lemon juice
1 Tbsp (15 ml) honey
2 Tbsp (30 ml) hazelnuts or almonds, grated or finely chopped (optional)

Soak oat flakes and raisins in milk overnight. Next morning, add grated apples, lemon juice and honey. Mix thoroughly. Spoon into cereal bowls and top with nuts.

Digestible Oats
Usually oats are not used for baking because they lack gluten, which keeps bread from falling apart. Oats are most commonly flaked and used as cereal. In preparation for flaking, the spelt (outer shell) is removed from the oat kernels (called groats), which are then steamed and rolled. The steaming process is important because it enhances the digestibility of oats. Another way to enhance the taste of oats is kiln drying. This can easily be done at home by simply moistening the kernels, then drying them in the oven at 140 F (60 C). This brings about a nut-like flavour with a pleasant aroma. Kiln-dried oats produce less mucilage, and the flakes and groats are wonderful for making patties and pancakes. Steaming and kiln drying does not destroy the enzymes or any vitamins, but makes oats more digestible.
**Oat Grits**

Among the cereal grains, oats can be regularly eaten raw due to their healthy high fat and unique fibre content. Serves four.

3/4 cup (185 ml) whole oat kernels, coarsely ground
Water to just cover oats
3 Tbsp (45 ml) yogurt or kefir
1 Tbsp (15 ml) lemon juice
1 Tbsp (15 ml) honey
1 Tbsp (15 ml) sunflower seeds or finely chopped almonds
2 large apples, washed
1/2 cup (125 ml) fruit or seasonal berries
1/4 tsp (1 ml) ground cinnamon

Mix oats and water thoroughly and let sit overnight. Next morning, add all other ingredients, coring and grating the apples at the end to avoid oxidation. Mix well and serve at once.

Freshly grind whole oat kernels in a grain mill or for a short time in an electric coffee mill.

**Delicious Oat Drink**

This drink boosts energy—any time of day. Soaking makes oats more easily digestible for children and the elderly. For adults you may add a little ginger. Serves three to four.

1 cup (250 ml) whole oat kernels, coarsely ground
6 cups (1 1/2 l) filtered water
1 Tbsp (15 ml) almond butter or hazelnut butter
2 Tbsp (30 ml) honey
Juice of one lemon
2 ripe bananas
1/2 tsp (2 ml) pure vanilla extract
Dash each ground cloves and cinnamon, to season

Soak ground oats in water for 12 hours or overnight. Next morning, strain the oats through a sieve. The liquid is the base of your drink. (Use the strained oats in soup later—see box.) Measure two to three cups of the oat liquid and place in a blender. Add all other ingredients and blend to a smooth drink. Add more base to adjust consistency as desired.

To make a soup from the leftover oat grits, season six cups (1 1/2 litres) of filtered water with a vegetable bouillon cube. Mix one-half cup (125 ml) of this broth with one free-range egg. Bring remaining broth to a rapid boil and add the oat grits, stirring constantly to avoid burning. Boil for a few minutes. Remove from stove and whisk in the egg mixture. Season to taste with vegetable salt. Add a dash of cayenne pepper, if desired. Finish with chopped parsley and chives and serve while hot.
Cherry-Oat Soufflé With Vanilla Sauce

The sour cherries in this irresistible dessert are low in calories and high in vitamin A and folic acid. Serves four.

Soufflé:
3 cups (750 ml) oat flakes (rolled oats)
1 Tbsp (15 ml) butter
2 cups (500 ml) pitted sour cherries
2 free-range eggs
1 cup (250 ml) milk
2 Tbsp (30 ml) honey
1 tsp (5 ml) pure vanilla extract

Dash ground cinnamon, ground anise and coriander, to taste
Butter to grease dish

Vanilla sauce:
2 cups (500 ml) milk
2 Tbsp (30 ml) natural sugar such as Sucanat or Rapadura
2 tsp (10 ml) pure vanilla extract or 1 vanilla pod
1 Tbsp (15 ml) cornstarch or arrowroot powder
1 free-range egg

In pot, heat butter on low and gently roast oat flakes for 15 minutes, stirring constantly to avoid burning. Strain cherries and set the juice aside. In a bowl, beat eggs with milk, honey and spices. Grease an ovenproof soufflé dish, then layer half of the roasted oats, half the egg-milk mixture and cherries. Top with remaining oats, then pour remaining egg-milk mixture overtop. Bake in preheated oven at 350 F (180 C) for 30 minutes.

Next, make the vanilla sauce. Bring milk with sugar and vanilla extract or pod (cut it in half and scrape the seeds out) to a boil. In the meantime, dissolve cornstarch or arrowroot powder in a bit of water. When the milk has boiled, stir in cornstarch or arrowroot and cook until sauce thickens. Remove from stove and discard vanilla pod. Add egg yolk while constantly stirring. Let sauce cool. Beat egg white and add to vanilla sauce.

Serve the soufflé while still hot with vanilla or cherry sauce or whip cream.

To make cherry sauce, slowly bring the reserved cherry juice to a boil. Dissolve one tablespoon (15 ml) of cornstarch or arrowroot powder in a bit of water and stir into cherry juice. Let thicken and remove from stove. Cool and serve.