Wholesome Oats...Not Just for Breakfast Anymore

The Folklore: American colonists first planted oats in the 1600's. But oats weren't packaged for sale in the U.S. until 1852. Twenty-five years later came Quaker Oats, featuring that same cylindrical package with the familiar face we see today, on its 125th anniversary.

The Facts: Oats are a leading grain crop in the U.S. Yet, while a staple in pantries, only about 5% of what is grown is fed to humans; the rest is animal fodder. We're missing out on a lot.

Oats are one of the most nutritious grains, rich in complex carbohydrates, yet with more protein than corn, rice or wheat. They are a rich source of fiber—four grams in one cup, cooked—half of which is soluble. Oats are also an excellent source of manganese and selenium, a good source of magnesium and also contain zinc and copper.

Phytonutrients in oats called saponins act as natural detergents that help "sponge up" cholesterol in the digestive tract so it can then be removed from the body. Since 1997, the Food and Drug Administration has also allowed a specific health claim for oats, which says that the soluble fiber in oatmeal "may reduce the risk of heart disease."

The Findings: More than 40 studies have shown that eating oatmeal along with a low-fat diet can help lower blood cholesterol levels, particularly in people whose cholesterol levels are high. The soluble fiber in oats can also help blunt the rise in blood sugar levels after a meal, a plus for people with diabetes.

Finnish researchers recently provided the first long-term evidence that oats can be safely eaten by people with celiac disease, also known as celiac sprue or gluten-sensitive enteropathy.

Products containing colloidal oatmeal—oats ground to a very fine powder—are an effective over-the-counter remedy for itchy skin conditions.

The Finer Points: Oats can even be eaten raw. In fact, it's the main ingredient in muesli, a Swiss version of cold breakfast cereal. Oats and oat bran also make flavorful additions to pancakes, muffins and other baked goods. In addition, they are excellent extenders for ground meat and poultry. If you don't want oats to be as noticeable in a recipe, use quick oats or oat bran rather than rolled oats.

To make basic granola: Add desired amounts of cinnamon, honey and wheat germ to oats, then spread on a lightly greased pan and bake at 300°F to lightly toast until golden brown (about 30 to 45 minutes). Stir in chopped dried fruit and nuts when cool.

Dilled Salmon Cakes

<table>
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<th>Sauce</th>
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<td>½ cup plain nonfat yogurt</td>
<td>½ cup chopped tomato</td>
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<tr>
<td>½ cup chopped cucumber</td>
<td>1 tablespoon finely chopped onion</td>
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<td>1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh dill or 1 teaspoon dried dill weed</td>
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Salmon Cakes

One 14 ½-ounce can pink salmon, drained, with skin removed (leave bones in for extra calcium)

¾ cup uncooked oats, quick or old-fashioned

½ cup skim milk

2 egg whites, lightly beaten

2 tablespoons finely chopped onion

1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh dill or 1 teaspoon dried dill weed

½ teaspoon salt (optional)

1. Combine ingredients for sauce; mix well.
2. Combine ingredients for salmon cakes; mix well. Let stand five minutes. Shape into eight patties about one-half inch thick.
3. Lightly spray a non-stick skillet with cooking spray. Cook salmon cakes over medium heat for three to four minutes on each side or until golden brown. Serve with sauce.

Serves 4 (two patties each).

Nutrition Information Per Serving:

Calories: 225; Fat: 6 grams (mostly unsaturated); Protein: 26 grams; Sodium: 138 milligrams; Fiber: 2.5 grams; Omega-3's (DHA and EPA): 1.6 grams.

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In Brief

How Much Exercise?

What is the optimal exercise regimen for improving blood lipids? Duke University researchers suggest it's the amount of physical activity more than the intensity that matters most.

They found that any exercise was better than none when it came to improving lipid levels in 84 overweight men and women with abnormal blood lipids. The inactive group gained weight and showed deterioration in lipid profiles even faster than anticipated. Moreover, more exercise was better than less (20 miles per week vs. 12), and the amount appeared more important than the intensity (walking vs. jogging).

Healthy changes occurred independent of fitness levels, even in the absence of significant weight loss. The researchers speculate that exercise may lead to changes in enzymes that benefit blood lipids and improve insulin sensitivity.

The researchers conclude that any exercise is better than none, though more is better, and that weight loss need not occur to see benefits to the heart.

Activity Boosts Bones

Regular physical activity protects against hip fractures in older women, according to 12 years of data from the Nurses' Health Study. And the more, the better. Of 61,200 postmenopausal women, those reporting the most exercise from all activities had 55% fewer fractures than sedentary women.

Women who walked four or more hours a week at an average pace had 41% fewer fractures than women who walked less than one hour a week. The faster the pace, the lower the risk.

Furthermore, less active women who became more active showed a big reduction in risk to bones compared to women who remained sedentary, suggesting it's never too late to start. But results also suggest that activity must be maintained to preserve benefits.

In Coming Issues

Preventing stroke: The latest nutrition research...Does food affect mood? ...Pros and cons of brand-name laxatives...Easy-to-swallow supplements.