

FLAXSEED

WHAT IS IT?

Flaxseed is the seed from the plant *Linum usitatissimum*. The seed or the seed oil is used to make medicine. Flaxseed and flaxseed oil/linseed oil are rich sources of the essential fatty acid alpha-linolenic acid (omega-6). Alpha-linolenic acid is a building block in the body for omega-3 fatty acids. Eating flaxseed regularly may reduce the risk of certain cancers. Flaxseed is a source of phytoestrogens (plant-based compounds similar to estrogen) called lignans. These lignans can have hormone-like effects on the body. Flaxseed is a source of fiber. Drink plenty of water or other fluids every day to prevent a blockage in your bowel.

WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

Menopausal symptoms (likely effective)

Osteoporosis (possibly ineffective)

Breast cancer

Constipation

High cholesterol

Menopausal symptoms:

- Studies have shown that taking flaxseed orally 40 grams per day significantly reduced symptoms of hot flashes by about 35% and night sweats by about 44% in women with mild menopausal symptoms.
- In one clinical trial, flaxseed was comparable to hormone therapy for reducing symptoms but in another trial, flaxseed was no better than wheat germ.
- Another study that used a lower dose of flaxseed, 25 grams daily, found that this dose of flaxseed does not significantly improve hot flashes or measures of quality of life in postmenopausal women.

Breast cancer:

- Early research shows that eating a muffin containing flaxseed 25 grams every day for about 40 days significantly reduced signs of tumor growth in women newly diagnosed with breast cancer.
- The effect of eating flaxseed on breast cancer outcomes is not known.
- Research on the effect of dietary intake of flaxseed on breast cancer risk is conflicting. Most research looks at the effect of dietary lignan intake on breast cancer risk, but does not specifically look at flaxseed intake. (Flaxseed is one source of dietary lignans).

- Some large studies suggest that high intake of dietary lignans are associated with a significantly reduced risk of developing breast cancer but other studies did not find any connection between dietary lignan intake and breast cancer risk.

IS IT SAFE?

- Flaxseed is safe for most people when used orally

SIDE EFFECTS WARNINGS AND PRECAUTIONS

Flaxseed may have a laxative effect. Higher doses may cause more side effects:

Bloating, abdominal pain

Constipation, diarrhea, gas

Nausea

Hormone changes

Skin rash

Increased risk of bleeding

Changes in blood sugar levels

AVOID if allergic to flaxseed, flaxseed oil or other plants of the Linaceae family:

- Flaxseed should be taken with plenty of water to prevent blockage in your gut. DO NOT USE flaxseed if you have had a bowel obstruction or an ileus (temporary paralysis of a portion of the intestines).
- Flaxseed can lower blood sugar levels. If you are taking medications for blood sugar-Monitor your blood sugars closely.
- Flaxseed might slow blood clotting and increase risk of bleeding.
- Flaxseed can have effects like estrogen so it is unknown the long term safety of flaxseed and people with hormone receptor positive types of breast cancer