

Oatmeal – A delicious and healthy start to a day

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Did you know more oatmeal is sold during the month of January than any other month of the year? Oatmeal is a delicious and healthy start to a day. Try cooking your oatmeal in milk for added nutrition and a creamy taste. You can also boost the nutrition by serving your oatmeal with antioxidant-rich berries such as blueberries or raspberries. If the berries are frozen, add them after cooking to cool your oatmeal.

There are several types of oats and each produces different textures, nutritional characteristics and cooking times. People often ask which kind of oats is best. Keep reading to learn more about each type.

- Whole oat groats are the uncut, whole oat seed kernel. This is the basic raw material for all other oat products. They can be cooked or steamed but because of their size, the cooking process can take up to an hour. The benefit of eating whole oat groats is that they are digested very slowly, making them very filling and reducing the glycemic load on the body.
- Steel cut oats are what they imply, whole oat groats that have been cut into little pieces with steel blades. They have a faster cooking time than whole oat groats and maintain all of the nutritional value of the whole grain.
- Thick rolled oats are steamed whole oat groats that are rolled into a thick flake. Of all rolled oat products, they are slowest to cook (about 20 minutes) and slowest to digest which makes them more filling.
- Regular rolled oats or “old-fashioned oats” are rolled into a thin flake and generally associated with a bowl of oatmeal. They take less time to cook and are a bit mushier. This type of oat is usually called for in recipes such as cookies and breads. Regular rolled oats are an excellent source of whole grain nutrition.
- Quick oats are made from steel cut oats, finely cut, steamed and rolled into small flakes. They cook quickly, within about three minutes. The nutritional benefits are similar to rolled oats, but their small size allows the body to digest them more quickly.
- Instant oats are steel cut oats that are steamed, finely cut and then pre-cooked. Typically, you can find these oats in the pre-flavored or pre-sweetened instant oatmeal packets. Nutritionally, they offer many of the benefits of regular oats, but less per serving due to added flavorings, such as sugar and salt.

It's quite evident that oatmeal is a healthy, nutritionally dense food that contains plenty of complex carbohydrates, a small amount of healthy fats, no cholesterol, no sodium (except in instant, packaged varieties), approximately four grams of fiber, vitamins and minerals. Oats have been found to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, reduce serum cholesterol, reduce blood pressure, help control blood glucose levels and may lessen the risk of certain cancers (via a reduction in obesity as well as antioxidant activity).

For the start of the New Year, try adding oatmeal to your breakfast. You may have a favorite way of preparing it for your family; however, if oatmeal is not your first choice for breakfast, you can add it to your pancake mix, muffins or breads, or mix it with other hot cereals to reap the many benefits.

Banana Split Oatmeal

Serves 1

¼ cup quick cooking oatmeal
1/8 tsp salt (optional)
½ cup very hot tap water
½ banana, sliced
½ cup strawberry, vanilla or chocolate frozen yogurt or low-fat ice cream

In a small microwave-safe bowl, mix together oatmeal and salt; stir in water. Microwave for 1 minute; stir. Microwave for another minute; stir. Microwave an additional 30-60 seconds or until thickened; stir again.

Top with banana slices and frozen yogurt or low-fat ice cream.

Per serving: 210 calories, 5 g fat, 5 g protein, 39 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 350 mg sodium

Brown Sugar Oatmeal Pancakes

Serves 5

10 Tbsp. quick cooking oats
½ cup whole wheat flour
½ cup all-purpose flour
½ tsp. baking soda
½ tsp. salt (optional)
1/3 cup packed brown sugar
1 egg
2 Tbsp. vegetable oil
1 cup buttermilk

In a small bowl, combine the oats, flours, baking soda, salt and sugar. In another small bowl, beat the egg, oil and buttermilk. Stir into dry ingredients, just until moistened. Pour batter by 1/3 cupfuls onto a greased hot griddle. Turn when bubbles form on top, and cook until the second side is golden brown. Top with syrup or your favorite fruits.

Per serving: 270 calories, 8 g fat, 7 g protein, 42 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber, 430 mg sodium

If you would like more information about nutrition and healthy eating, please call the Gundersen Lutheran Nutrition Clinic at (608) 775-3447 or go to gundluth.org/Nutrition.