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What Are Poppy Seeds Good For?

By Dr. Mercola | August 3rd, 2017

The poppy plant (*Papaver somniferum*) is infamous for numerous reasons, one of them being that it is the source of opium, a highly addictive narcotic. This led to the withdrawal of its legalization as an agricultural crop in many countries across the globe. Up until now, some countries still ban the cultivation and the distribution of this crop.

But despite its notoriety, the poppy plant is also the source of one of the most loved pastry ingredients in the world: poppy seeds. They are well-known for adding a crunch to various confections and desserts. Poppy seed oil, which can be used as both a culinary and a medicinal oil, can be extracted from them as well. Keep reading to learn more about this oilseed, and its history, health benefits and various uses.

What Are Poppy Seeds?

The poppy plant has been part of the agricultural world since the early ages, having been mentioned in the early accounts of the Greeks and Romans. The earliest documentation reaches as far back as 3,000 years ago. For the Egyptians, poppies symbolized rebirth because of its ability to be "reborn" after the harvest season.

The poppy plant is also a well-known symbol of remembrance for war veterans, which originates from its mention in the poem "In Flanders Fields," which symbolizes the beauty and the renewal of war-ravaged land.

Aside from its literary and historical symbolism, the poppy plant is widely known for the various products that can be sourced from it. The vibrant poppy flowers are also used for ornamental purposes by the gardening community.

After the poppy flowers start to dry up, its kidney-shaped seeds start developing in the pods. This is one of the products from the poppy plant that is legal to produce and acquire. The opiate component of the plant is said to disappear once the seeds develop, making it safe for consumption. One of the easiest indications whether the seeds are ready for harvest is the rattling sound the pods give off when they are slightly shaken.

Poppy seeds come in three different colors: white, blue and black. Blue seeds are commonly called the European poppy seeds because they are abundant in that part of the world, while white poppy seeds are called Indian, Middle Eastern or Asian. There are no distinct differences between these types aside from their color, with the choice mainly depending on the color preference of the baker or the cook and its availability.

Poppy seeds are mainly used in the culinary world for their crunchy texture and unique flavor. One of the most famous pastries that incorporate poppy seeds originates from Hungary, and is called makosh, or Hungarian poppy seed roll; it uses poppy seeds as a filling. Today, poppy seeds are commonly added to bagels, puddings, cakes and tarts. But although it's usually added to baked goods, its culinary use is not limited to this.

Gain These Health Benefits From Poppy Seeds

Being a product of a relatively infamous plant, the health benefits of poppy seeds have been questioned time and time again. People fear that the seeds may cause the same narcotic effects that other poppy products give.

However, poppy seeds actually offer impressive nutritional components that can help your body improve or maintain optimal function. The health benefits of poppy seeds include the following:

- Aids in the prevention of heart disorders. Each serving of poppy seed contains a considerable amount of linoleic acid, an omega-6 fatty acid that offer protection against heart disease. However, it should be noted that excessive amounts of omega-6 fatty acids can still cause detrimental effects on the body. A healthy balance of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids is highly recommended to maintain heart health.
- Supports bone maintenance and development. Poppy seeds contain both iron and phosphorus, minerals essential for the maintenance of both muscles and bones.
- Prevents constipation and other digestive problems. Poppy seeds have high amounts of dietary fiber, which aids the digestive system in metabolizing and smoothly processing ingested food, preventing constipation and other digestive problems.
- Enhances brain function. Calcium, iron and magnesium are minerals needed by the body to regulate brain activity and the development of neurons. They also aid in the production of neurotransmitters.
- Assists in red blood cell production. The abundance of copper and iron in poppy seeds improves red blood cell formation, which helps in the prevention of anemia and other blood-related conditions.
- Helps deal with sleeplessness. Taking a teaspoon of poppy seed oil before going to bed has been observed to help ease the symptoms of insomnia by promoting relaxation.