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Hemp seeds are the seeds of the hemp plant, *Cannabis sativa*. They are from the same species as cannabis (marijuana). However, hemp seeds contain only trace amounts of THC, the compound that causes the drug-like effects of marijuana. Hemp seeds are exceptionally nutritious and rich in healthy fats, protein and various minerals. Here are 6 health benefits of hemp seeds that are backed up by science.

### **Health Benefits**

#### **Hemp Seeds Are Incredibly Nutritious:**

Technically a nut, hemp seeds are very nutritious. They have a mild, nutty flavor and are often referred to as hemp hearts. Hemp seeds contain over 30% fat. They are exceptionally rich in two essential fatty acids, linoleic acid (omega-6) and alpha-linolenic acid (omega-3). They also contain gamma-linolenic acid, which has been linked with several health benefits. Hemp seeds are a great protein source, as more than 25% of their total calories are from high-quality protein. That is considerably more than similar foods like chia seeds and flaxseeds, which provide about 16–18%. Hemp seeds are also a great source of vitamin E and minerals such as phosphorus, potassium, sodium, magnesium, sulfur, calcium, iron and zinc. Hemp seeds can be consumed raw, cooked or roasted. Hemp seed oil is also very healthy, and has been used as a food/medicine in China for at least 3,000 years.

#### **Hemp Seeds May Reduce the Risk of Heart Disease:**

Heart disease is the number one killer worldwide. Interestingly, eating hemp seeds may reduce the risk of heart disease via several mechanisms. They contain high amounts of the amino acid arginine, which is used to produce nitric oxide in the body. Nitric oxide is a gas molecule that makes the blood vessels dilate and relax,



leading to lowered blood pressure and a reduced risk of heart disease. In one large study of more than 13,000 people, increased arginine intake was linked with decreased levels of C-reactive protein (CRP). CRP is an inflammatory marker linked with heart disease. The gamma-linolenic acid found in hemp seeds has also been linked with reduced inflammation, which may decrease the risk of diseases like heart disease. Additionally, animal studies have shown that hemp seeds or hemp seed oil may reduce blood pressure, decrease the risk of blood clot formation and help the heart recover after a heart attack.

### **Hemp Seeds and Oil May Benefit Skin Disorders:**

Fatty acids may affect immune responses in the body. This may have something to do with the balance of omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids. Hemp seeds are a good source of polyunsaturated and essential fatty acids. They have about a 3:1 ratio of omega-6 to omega-3, which is considered in the optimal range. Studies have shown that giving hemp seed oil to people with eczema may improve blood levels of essential fatty acids. It may also relieve dry skin, improve itchiness and reduce the need for skin medication.

### **Hemp Seeds Are a Great Source of Plant-Based Protein:**

About 25% of calories in hemp seeds come from protein, which is relatively high. In fact, by weight, hemp seeds provide amounts of protein similar to beef and lamb. 30 grams of hemp seeds, or 2–3 tablespoons, provide about 11 grams of protein. They are considered a complete protein source, which means that they provide all the essential amino acids. Essential amino acids are not produced in the body and need to be gotten from the diet. Complete protein sources are very rare in the plant kingdom, as plants often lack the amino acid lysine. Quinoa is another example of a complete, plant-based protein source. Hemp seeds contain significant amounts of the amino acids methionine and cysteine, as well as very high levels of arginine and glutamic acid. The digestibility of hemp protein is also very good — better than protein from many grains, nuts and legumes.

### **Hemp Seeds May Reduce Symptoms of PMS and Menopause:**

Up to 80% of women of reproductive age may suffer from physical or emotional symptoms caused by premenstrual syndrome (PMS). These symptoms are very likely caused by sensitivity to the hormone prolactin. Gamma-linolenic acid (GLA), found in hemp seeds, produces prostaglandin E1, which reduces the effects of prolactin. In a study of women with PMS, taking one gram of essential fatty acids (including 210 mg of GLA) per day resulted in a significant decrease in symptoms. Other studies have shown that primrose oil, which is rich in GLA, may be highly effective in reducing symptoms for women who have failed other PMS therapies. It decreased breast pain and tenderness, depression, irritability and fluid retention associated with PMS. Because hemp seeds are high in GLA, several studies have indicated that hemp seeds may also help reduce the symptoms of menopause. Exactly how this works is unknown, but it has been suggested that the GLA in hemp seeds may help to regulate the hormone imbalances and inflammation associated with menopause.

### **Whole Hemp Seeds May Aid Digestion:**

Fiber is an essential part of the diet and is linked with better digestive health. Whole hemp seeds are a good source of both soluble (20%) and insoluble (80%) fiber. Soluble fiber forms a gel-like substance in the gut. It is a valuable source of nutrients for the beneficial digestive bacteria, and may also reduce spikes in blood sugar and regulate cholesterol levels. Insoluble fiber adds bulk to fecal matter and may help food and waste pass through the gut.



## Healthy Foods

## Health Benefits: Hemp Seeds

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Consuming insoluble fiber has also been linked with a reduced risk of diabetes. However, de-hulled or shelled hemp seeds (also known as hemp hearts) contain very little fiber, because the fiber-rich shell has been removed.