

## **THE HUMBLE OAT . . . . .** **. . . . . one of Nature's** **best-kept nutrition secrets**

Next time you're surging through the supermarket, shopping trolley in fast forward, spare just a moment to observe the number of breakfast cereal choices currently available. Most large supermarkets display a whole aisle of attractive and brightly-coloured boxes, every one hotly contending for your attention (and especially for your dollar).

Today's highly-processed cereals, for the most part, bear little resemblance to the original grain from which they have been milled. Most taste more like crunchy snack food than anything even remotely resembling natural rice, wheat or corn.

Breakfast cereal is big business. If you're not convinced about the sorts of profits inherent in such products, compare the price per gram weight of one of your highly-processed favourites with that of minimally-processed cereals like the rolled oat.

### **OATS – NATURE'S TREASURE CHEST**

Inconspicuously packed in its Home Brand plastic wrapper, bags piled up untidily in a rack somewhere at the bottom of the supermarket shelves, lies the humble oat, one of Nature's greatest (and cheapest) little treasures.



OATS – NATURE'S NUTRITION TREASURE CHEST

The oat quite veritably is a nutrition treasure chest. Probably best known in its cooked form as porridge or perhaps as muesli, the oat is versatile enough to be used not only as a breakfast cereal but also as an ingredient in making delicious cakes, muffins, biscuits, desserts such as Apple Crumble, pastry bases and as a substitute for breadcrumbs in stuffings or coatings.

I do hope you've tried Swiss Muesli (sometimes called Bircher Muesli) which is an absolutely delicious start to the day; in fact, I have heard it said that Swiss Muesli is rather like eating dessert from breakfast! Definitely worth trying, especially knowing what a nutritious choice it is, providing energy for hours without any hint of craving for the wrong foods.

### **GETTING EXCITED ABOUT OATS????**

Let me explain from a Nutritionist's standpoint just why anyone could become so excited about oats! As you will read in a moment, the oat has so many properties capable of skewing your physiology in the right direction that a serving just once a day solves a host of nutrition issues all at one meal.

# The 'HEALTH IS WEALTH' Series

YOUR HEALTH - IN YOUR HANDS

**Sodium/Potassium Ratio** Researchers are now considering that absolute dietary salt intake may not be as critical an issue as is the ratio of sodium to potassium. Processed breakfast cereals invariably contain added salt, so that their Na<sup>+</sup>/K<sup>+</sup> ratio averages 4:1. Compare this to oats where the equivalent ratio is a mere 1:62. A great start to normalising blood pressure!

**Glycaemic Index (GI)** The insulin response to all carbohydrates is not identical. This means that some carbohydrates such as rice and potatoes greatly raise blood glucose whilst other foods have a lesser effect. This fact is becoming increasingly recognised in planning diabetic diets. Foods with the lowest GI (in relation to glucose at 100) are recommended over those with GI values between 50 and 100. Low GI foods include oats (49), barley (29) and lentils (29). Compare this to rice bubbles with a GI of 95, weetbix at 75 and corn flakes at 80! Equally important, these three cereals have been stripped of most essential micro-nutrients.

**Food for intestinal flora** Oats contain significant quantities of soluble fibre, the perfect food needed by the microflora for their growth. Low intake of dietary soluble fibre prevents the colonic microflora from reproducing optimally.

Under the influence of the microflora, soluble fibres digest to short-chain fatty acids (SCFA). These SCFA's provide essential nutrients for the endothelial cells lining the colon (large intestine). It is now generally considered that healthy colonic endothelial cells are essential in protection against bowel cancer.

In addition, SCFA's are reabsorbed from the colon and travel to the liver. Here, one of these SCFA's, *propionic acid*, exerts an inhibitory effect on HMG CoA reductase, the enzyme which allows the liver to synthesise its own cholesterol. The family of statin drugs prescribed by medical practitioners the world over for lowering blood cholesterol work by blocking this enzyme.

And who would have ever thought that the not-so-glamorous oat could do exactly the same job as the popular cholesterol-lowering statin pharmaceutical drugs?



*Today's' highly-processed cereals for the most part, bear little resemblance to the original grain from which they have been milled. With most trace nutrients removed in the milling and separating, much of the remainder is destroyed by baking at high temperatures. Treat them as snacks – not as foods to supply nutrients!*

