



Sesame seeds – unsung dietary heroes

More than just a culinary delicacy, Sesame's medicinal renown dates back to Egyptian times when it was featured in the scrolls of the Ebers as a highly respected medicine. Women in ancient Babylon were believed to use a mixture of honey and sesame seeds (havla) to prolong youth and beauty, and Roman soldiers consumed the same mixture for strength and energy.

Our human ancestors were not wrong in their assumptions - sesame seeds contain two unique substances: sesamin and sesamolin which are believed to reduce blood levels of cholesterol, boost the immune system, and decrease the risk of certain cancers. In fact, just a ¼ cup of sesame seeds provides the body with 74 % of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of copper, 31 % of the RDA for magnesium, and 35 % of the RDA for calcium; copper alone, being particularly powerful in reducing the inflammation and pain caused by rheumatoid arthritis, and also playing an important role in providing strength and elasticity in blood vessels, bones and joints. In addition to being an excellent source of copper, magnesium and calcium, sesame seeds are also a good source of manganese, iron, phosphorus, vitamin B1 (thiamine), zinc, vitamin E, protein and fibre.

Sesame seed oil has been used as a healing tool for thousands of years too. It has natural antibacterial, anti-inflammatory and antiviral properties and has proven invaluable in treating common skin pathogens such as staphylococcus and streptococcus, as well as common skin fungi like those found in athlete's foot. Moreover, in India it has been used in experiments to unblock arteries. Ayurvedic physicians in Holland have also used the oil to treat chronic diseases such as hepatitis, diabetes and migraines. Not to mention a carefully regulated experiment in Iowa which reported an 85 % reduction in the bacteria which cause gingivitis – proving it to be just as effective as manufactured mouth washes.

Sesame seed oil can also be used as nose drops for chronic sinusitis and as a throat gargle to kill strep and common cold bacteria. Sufferers of psoriasis and dry skin ailments have found sesame seed oil to prove very effective, and it has even been successfully used to kill lice infestations in children. When applied to the skin after wind or sun overexposure, sesame oil is said to calm the burning sensation and provide healing properties to the skin. Sesame seed oil can also protect the skin from the effects of chlorine in swimming pools and has shown promising protective results when used on the skin before and after radiation treatments.

Sesame seed oil can protect a baby's tender skin against nappy rash. It can also be swabbed in the noses of school-age children to protect against airborne viruses and bacteria. Teenagers can use it to help control acne outbreaks and neutralise the toxins which develop both on the skin's surface and in the pores. And last, but by no means least, adults can benefit from its skin tightening properties. Unless you suffer from nut allergies ... What's not to like?

