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NEWS YOU CAN USE

Hemp as Health Food

By Liz Robins

The Declaration of Independence was drafted on it. Abraham Lincoln used its seed oil to fuel lamps in his home. Henry Ford even built a car body with the fiber as an experiment due to its incredible strength.

Industrial hemp has a rich history in American culture, and it's no wonder, given the sustainable and versatile nature of this long-cultivated plant. But federal policy enacted in the late 1950s—which doesn't distinguish between industrial hemp and drug varieties—has since prohibited its growth in the United States. Currently, hemp fiber and food-grade seed and oil are imported from Canada and other industrialized nations where it can be grown legally.

Hemp advocates are hoping that attitudes and U.S. federal policy will change, and Hemp History Week (hemphistoryweek.com; May 2nd to 8th) is one way they're building awareness of the plant's history and myriad benefits.

Health benefits are among them, thanks to the impressive nutritional profile of hemp seed and its oil. "Hemp seeds are considered a 'complete' protein, as their amino-acid profile includes all the essential ones, in good quantities and well-absorbed forms so that it can be a stand-in for animal protein sources," says Hemp History Week Endorser and Spokesperson Ashley Koff, R.D., also an author and health and lifestyle contributor.

Hemp-seed oil on its own also has a lot to offer, nutritionally speaking. It provides an ideal ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids (4:1 or 5:1), says Koff, which contribute to heart and brain health, immunity, and more.

"This need to consume more omega-6 than omega-3 for optimal health may surprise people because of how much we hear about the need to get in omega-3 fatty acids," says Koff. "But the current diet is so out of balance, with ratios anywhere from 10:1 to estimates of 25:1 in those consum-

ing nutrient-poor diets. Thus, protocol has been to replete omega-3 to correct this imbalance. While this is necessary for many, those consuming a healthy diet and looking at preventive health want to aim for the more desirable ratio (4:1), which hemp offers."

Koff points out that the quality of omega-6 fatty acids varies significantly from whole organic food sources to highly processed, poor-quality food ingredients. "Someone adding omega-3-rich foods into their diet—wild fish, soybeans, walnuts, chia seeds—should look to hemp oil to help ensure sufficient intake of quality omega-6 fatty acids, she recommends. "Some omega-6s are pro-inflammatory, but GLA (gamma-linolenic acid)—the omega-6 in hemp—has [been] shown to be anti-inflammatory."

GLA and SDA, or stearidonic acid, are both polyunsaturated fatty acids in hemp oil that contribute to skin, hair, nail, and hormonal health, says Koff. SDA also helps convert dietary omega-3 fatty acids into forms the body can use.

"One of the challenges we often hear about vegetarian sources of ALA (like flax seed) is that it doesn't readily convert to the needed EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) and DHA (docosahexaenoic) fatty acids in the body, or that some bodies convert it better than others," explains Koff. "So the presence of SDA in hemp, especially for a non-fish eating vegetarian or a vegan, is significant."

A growing array of hemp foods on the market—many of them organic—makes it easy to incorporate this nutrient powerhouse into the diet. "And don't worry about looking for THC content (the stuff that gets you 'high')," assures Koff. "Hemp-seed varieties sourced don't contain significant amounts, even with daily routine consumption." ■

Liz Robins is the Contributing Editor of Health & Nutrition at *Organic Spa Magazine*.



Reap the Benefits!

HEMP MILK: Pour it on cereal or make a smoothie with frozen fruit and hemp protein powder for a morning or post-workout pick-me-up.

HEMP OIL: Drizzle on salads or add to soups and sauces (It's not recommended for high-temperature cooking or frying, as the nutritional value diminishes at temperatures over 350 degrees Fahrenheit.)

HEMP GRANOLA: Top off your favorite cereal with a small serving, or add to organic yogurt for a crunchy boost of healthy fats and other nutrients for sustained energy.

SHELLED HEMP SEEDS: Sprinkle on yogurt or salads, add to baked dishes, or eat a small handful as a satisfying, protein-rich snack.

HEMP BREAD AND BAGELS: Give your sandwich a nutty, nutritious kick by subbing in these tasty varieties for your typical slices. Toasting really brings out the flavor.