

Family Living
Focus
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Oats? Groats?

Oatmeal for breakfast brings back memories of my mother saying, "It will stick to your ribs."

Oatmeal and other whole grains do help to slow the rate of digestion. The soluble fiber in oatmeal keeps you full longer. Research suggests that oatmeal for breakfast can reduce morning hunger and curb your appetite so you won't be starving at lunch.

Oats are thought to be native to Asia. In Ancient times they were used for medicinal purposes. Greeks and Romans thought oats were just a pesky weed. Recognized as staple food in Scandinavia, Europe, and British Isles since 1000 B.C., oats were introduced to North America in the mid 1600's by early colonists.

During processing, the outer indigestible husk is removed. The oat bran and germ remain intact, making it a very nourishing whole grain. This common grain is an excellent source of dietary fiber, and provides significant amounts of B vitamins and folic acid.

Oats provide complex carbohydrates and both insoluble and soluble fiber. Recently oat products, especially oatmeal and oat bran, have attracted attention as more and more research has pointed to the cholesterol lowering benefits of the grain. This effect is greater in those individuals with higher cholesterol levels than those whose levels are within a "safe" range. This phenomenon is primarily due to the high

level of beta-glucans found in the grain's soluble fiber. Researchers from the University of Minnesota found that blood cholesterol levels could be positively influenced by a daily intake of 3 grams of soluble fiber, or the equivalent of 1 1/2 cups of cooked oatmeal.

A morning bowl of oatmeal or other whole grain food can help to maintain healthy blood pressure levels. Emerging research suggests that oatmeal may even help reduce blood pressure by preventing the narrowing of the arteries that occurs following a high fat meal and promoting better blood flow.

Hot oatmeal often comes to mind when oats are mentioned. One can make breakfast and other meals interesting by using oats in different forms. Pre-cooked groats can be reheated with new toppings. Granola and muesli mixtures can be alternatives to cereals, or add some creative toppings to cooked oatmeal.

Baking with oat products adds flavor to many products. Add oat flour or oatmeal to breads for extra nutrition and flavor. Use oatmeal to thicken soups and stews and as a filler in meatloaf and casseroles.

Oats come in many forms: Oat groats — Whole oat kernels, which can be cooked like rice or wheat berries. Presoak to

shorten cooking time. They have a nutty, slightly sweet flavor. Try them (cooked) as a topping on apple crisp, serve as a side dish like rice, or in salads and stuffing.

Steel cut oats — These are groats that have been cut into chunks by steel blades. They are sometimes imported from Ireland in tins. They have a fairly long cooking time and a chewy texture. They are not rolled and look like coarse bits of grain.

Rolled oats — Probably the most familiar form to consumers. The kernels have been heated and pressed flat with steel rollers so they cook more quickly.

Old-fashioned oats are whole groats that have been steamed, pressed and rolled. They are thicker and take longer to cook. Quick cooking oats are sliced before steaming and pressing to reduce cooking time. Old-fashioned oats and quick cooking oats are usually interchangeable in recipes. Instant oats are pre-cooked, dried and pressed very thin. These are the "just add hot water" or microwave type of hot cereal. Do not substitute these for old-fashioned or quick cooking oats in recipes or the cookies and baked goods may turn into goeey lumps.

Oat bran — The outer layer of the oat kernel. It has a lighter color and finer texture than wheat bran. It is sometimes added to recipes or packaged as a hot cereal.

Oat milk — A fairly new product that is a non-dairy alternative to milk made from oats. It comes in plain and vanilla flavors.

Oat flour — Made from groats that have been ground into a fine powder. It contains no gluten so it needs to be used with a flour that contains gluten to help baked goods to rise properly.

Baked oatmeal is a popular dish served at several bed and breakfast establishments in Lancaster County. Ginny Ranck serves this one at Verdant View Farm in Strasburg.

Baked Oatmeal

- 1 cup oil
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 4 eggs, beaten
- 3/4 cups oatmeal
- 1 cup flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups milk
- 2 teaspoons vanilla (optional)
- 2 cups fresh fruit (like apple slices)
- 3/4 cup raisins or walnuts (optional)

Heat oven to 350 F. Grease a 9" X 13" pan. Mix together oil, sugars and eggs. Add oatmeal, flour, baking powder, salt, vanilla and milk. Fold in fruit and nuts, if desired. Bake for 30 35 minutes. Serve warm with milk and cinnamon or brown sugar.

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