

High-Fibre Foods: Chia Seeds

Tiny seeds that can add fibre and plant omega-3 fats - with a texture that deserves just as much attention as the nutrition.

A lot of fibre in a small amount

Chia seeds are a concentrated source of dietary fibre. The exact amount depends on the product and serving size, so checking the packet is the most reliable way to know what you are eating. Because they absorb liquid and swell, a relatively small quantity can change the texture and volume of a meal quite dramatically.

Fibre supports normal bowel function and helps feed the gut microbiome. It can also contribute to fullness and wider metabolic health. But more is not automatically better. If your usual diet is low in fibre, suddenly adding a large amount of chia may cause bloating, wind or discomfort. Gradual change is usually kinder to the digestive system.

Chia and omega-3

Chia seeds contain alpha-linolenic acid, or ALA, a plant-based omega-3 fatty acid. ALA is an essential fat, which means it needs to come from the diet. The body can convert some ALA into the longer-chain omega-3 fats EPA and DHA, but that conversion is limited. Chia can therefore be a useful plant source of ALA, while not being nutritionally identical to oily fish or algae-derived sources of EPA and DHA.

The texture can be the biggest issue

When chia seeds sit in liquid they form a gel-like coating. Some people enjoy this; others find it extremely difficult. For an autistic person, someone with ARFID or anyone with strong texture sensitivities, the slippery, seedy consistency of chia pudding may be impossible regardless of its nutritional value. That does not mean you are doing nutrition wrong.

If you want to try chia, texture can be altered. A small amount can be blended into a smoothie, mixed into an accepted yoghurt or alternative, incorporated into baking, or ground before use. But there is no need to force chia if the sensory experience is wrong for you. Fibre and healthy fats are available from many other foods.

Fluid matters

Because chia absorbs liquid, it is sensible to consume it prepared with sufficient fluid and to maintain adequate hydration. Dry chia can expand after contact with liquid, so people who have swallowing difficulties should be particularly cautious and seek appropriate clinical advice about food textures. Chia is not a substitute for drinking enough throughout the day.

Ways to use it without making food complicated

Nutrition advice often turns simple foods into elaborate recipes. You do not need a beautifully layered chia pudding. If you tolerate the seeds, a small amount added to something you already eat can be enough. Familiarity matters. The easiest nutritional change is often one that attaches itself to an existing routine rather than requiring a completely new meal.

If you use plant-based milk or yoghurt, checking whether it is fortified can also be useful, particularly for calcium, vitamin B12 and vitamin D where relevant. The nutritional value of the whole meal matters more than whether it looks like a wellness photograph.

Your chia check-in

Do I actually like the texture? Am I increasing fibre too quickly? Am I drinking enough? Could I use a smaller amount? Would ground or blended chia feel easier? Am I choosing this because it works for me, or because I feel I 'should' eat it? If chia is not manageable, what other fibre source already feels safe?

A message from me

A food can be nutritious and still not be right for you. Chia is a good example because its texture changes so much when it becomes wet. If that texture makes your whole body say no, listen to that information. We can support fibre intake in many different ways. The aim is never to prove that you can tolerate the latest healthy food; it is to find nourishment that works with your body and brain.

Clinical note

This resource is for general education. Fibre should usually be increased gradually. People with swallowing difficulties, significant gastrointestinal disease, persistent bowel symptoms or a highly restricted diet may need individual advice from an appropriate healthcare professional or registered dietitian.