NUTS & SEEDS : FRIEND OR FOE ?

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Nuts and seeds can be an excellent tasting and healthful whole food IF they are properly prepared. Nuts and seeds contain naturally occurring substances that actually inhibit digestion and can deplete the body of essential minerals. These substances; tannins, enzyme inhibitors, and phytic acid can be deactivated by properly soaking and properly drying the nuts and seeds. First let's take a look at these anti-nutrient components and then I'll describe how to properly prepare the nuts and seeds before consumption.

Soaked & Dried Walnuts

TANNINS

Raw nuts can contain large quantities of bitter tasting tannins. Tannins are a plant compound with astringent properties which shrink and constrict body tissues. If you put a small handful of walnuts in your mouth and hold them in your cheek you will quickly feel an unpleasant dryness and raw feeling. This is caused by the astringent properties of the tannin.

Soaking will remove the tannins and the bitterness. The result is a nut with a bitter-free, delicious creamy taste.

ENZYME INHIBITORS

There's a reason seeds and nuts can last for years. They contain enzyme inhibitors. Special chemical compounds which bind to enzymes to decrease their activity. This survival mechanism allows nuts and seeds to delay germination until conditions are optimal. Foods with enzyme inhibitors are very hard to digest as they prevent your digestive enzymes from functioning properly. A host of digestive issues can result from eating foods high in enzyme inhibitors including; bloating, gas, irritation of the intestinal lining, enlarged pancreas, and reduction in your body's digestive enzymes.

Soaking initiates the germination process for nuts and seeds and deactivates the enzyme inhibitors.

PHYTIC ACID

Phytic acid is a plant's primary method for storing phosphorus, a nutrient essential for plant health. Seeds and nuts are a concentrated source of phytic acid. The chemical structure of phytic acid is chelative, meaning it binds readily to minerals and metals. When you consume phytic acid it binds with iron, calcium, magnesium, copper and zinc preventing their absorption. Proper mineral balance is essential to health and some minerals, such as zinc, cannot be stored in the body.

Soaking and drying with low heat reduces, but doesn't eliminate, the phytic acid content.

PROPER PREPARATION

To properly prepare your nuts and seeds;

- use 1 tablespoon of sea salt for every 4 cups of nuts/seeds
- mix the salt with fresh filtered water
- place nuts/seeds in container
- pour salt water over nuts/seeds to completely cover them
- let soak 18 to 24 hours
- (cashews will become too soft if soaked more than 4-6hrs)
- Rinse in fresh filtered water
- Dry in a dehydrator or oven on low heat (150 deg)

Drying can take a significant amount of time (12-24 hours). Make sure the nuts/seeds are completely dry. They should be very crunchy. Any softness indicates greater drying time is required.

PROPER STORAGE

The soaking and drying will make the nuts and seeds highly digestible. However, keep in mind, this process has removed all the natural preservative properties of the nuts and seeds. They can no longer be left out and exposed to the air. Soaked and dried nuts and seeds should be stored in the refrigerator or can be frozen for longer term storage.

In my experience the process of soaking and drying nuts and seeds adds a considerable amount of work. However, the first time you do it, especially with walnuts, you may be quite alarmed at how nasty the soaking water becomes. It will certainly occur to you that perhaps you’re better off not consuming what’s in that water. I can guarantee you’ll love the taste of the nuts and seeds and your body will love the easily digestible nutrition!

Written by Peter Wright

This post is part of Fight Back Friday, Monday Mania, and Real Food Wednesday.