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Cancer Center

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FOR THE MEDIA

Chia may have some nutritional benefits, but evidence on specific clinical benefits is very limited.

The seeds of the chia plant are rich in fiber, polyunsaturated fatty acids, and alpha-linolenic acid, a type of essential fatty acid. They are thought to be useful for reducing risk of heart disease and as an aid in weight management. Data from a few small studies suggest that chia seeds may be helpful for patients with diabetes or help contribute to feelings of fullness, but chia did not appear to affect weight loss. In addition, reviews of the current evidence do not adequately support these claims. Larger well-designed trials are needed.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- Heart health

Most studies of chia's effects on heart disease risk have not shown meaningful results.

- Weight loss

Results from a clinical trial showed that chia did not affect weight loss. More studies are needed.

What are the side effects?

Small studies suggest chia is well tolerated when properly used.

Case reports

Throat blockage: In a 39-year-old man who received emergency treatment to remove chia seeds that had expanded in his throat.

Allergic reaction: In a 54-year-old man with previous history of rhinitis and asthma. He experienced rapid facial swelling, rash, shortness of breath, and dizziness that required emergency treatment after a few days of eating chia seeds to lower cholesterol levels.

Allergic skin reaction: In a 46-year-old man with a history of other allergies. Eczema and itchy lesions on his hands occurred after starting to add chia seeds to his morning yogurt, and disappeared when he stopped eating them.

What else do I need to know?

Patient Warnings:

Never consume dry chia seeds on their own, as they can absorb up to 27 times their weight in water. This may cause them to expand and become lodged in the throat. Chia seeds should be prepared or mixed with enough liquid to allow them to expand before eating.

Do Not Take if:

- You are taking blood pressure medications: Chia seeds may increase the adverse effects of these drugs.
- You have swallowing problems: Use chia seeds with caution, and never use dry chia seeds alone which may expand once in contact with a liquid, such as saliva or water.
- You are allergen-sensitive: Use chia seeds with caution, as there have been case reports of allergic reactions.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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