



Chia Seed Diet: Maintain a healthy weight & increase energy

Just a brief history of my own personal journey to find a diet that works for me. Heart disease runs in my family. From early childhood I was taught to avoid cholesterol which was thought to be the primary causal agent for heart disease. To minimize my fat intake I switched to a high carbohydrate diet (i.e.... lots of breads, pastas, potatoes, fruit juices, and sweets). The carbs gave me quick energy. Just what I thought I needed to carry on a busy medical practice.

In December 2008 I required emergency back fusion for a condition called cauda equine syndrome. In my case it was a benign growth impinging on the spinal cord causing pain and paralysis to my lower extremities. After months of rehabilitation I reached a plateau in strength and energy which was significantly lower than what I was capable of doing before my back condition developed. I did not have the strength for what I considered to be a proper work out and could barely make it through a busy day at work. I became depressed thinking that I was just too old to get back to my previous energy levels.

On Christmas in December 2009 my youngest son, Matthew, gave me a copy of the book "Born to Run", written by Christopher McDougall, an aging marathon runner whose body was giving out. He was looking for solutions that would allow him to improve his running. He learned of a group of super athletes, the Tarahumara Indians, who resided in the Copper Canyons of Mexico. He embarked on an exciting journey to find them and learn their secrets for success. These Indians were the world's greatest distance runners. They started running from early childhood, and by their early teens were capable of running 50-100 miles at a time.

One of the first things Chris learned about this tribe was their unusual diet habits. One of the main staples of their diet and something they routinely took with them when on a long distance run were chia seeds. Yes, it was the same seed that we applied to our chia pet in an effort to allow the ceramic head to grow hair. The "hair", of course, was the sprouting from the chia seeds.

At first I was skeptical that diet had much to do with running or their ability to consistently win 100 mile races against some very tough competition. I assumed that the most likely explanation of their long distance running successes was genetic in origin. However, I was desperate to improve my own stamina and I decided to give the chia seeds a try.

I ordered 5lbs of chia seed over the internet (about 8 dollars a pound, but note: one pound of dry chia seeds makes 10 bounds of hydrated chia seeds, thus the actual cost is 80 cents a pound). I found several YouTube videos on how to dilute with water and mix with other products to improve taste. The Indians simply add fresh lemon juice to the mix. I dilute it 50% with Diet Ocean Spray juice, which gives it a great taste.

I started adding the Chia seeds as a diet supplement in Jan of 2010. Every day I would fill a 4 cup container with my Chia seed/ Ocean Spray mix and use it as a snack, instead of the usual candy and junk foods that I relied on in the past for quick energy.

I was hoping for a quick improvement in strength and endurance, but was a bit disappointed when I observed no immediate benefit from my new diet supplement. Still, I thought that taking the Chia supplement was healthier than eating sweets and carbs, so I made the commitment to stick with it.

After several months of taking the Chia supplements on a regular basis I began to notice that I was making definite progress in gaining strength and energy for the first time in 18 months. My workouts were more intense, and I was no longer fatigued at the end of a busy day. Just as I was gaining confidence in my new diet something startling happened.

My weight which had been steady at 155 lbs. for more than 30 years started to drop. When it fell to 150 I happily assumed that I was trimming down in response to a more vigorous exercise program. However, my weight continued to drop. In the next two weeks it dropped to 140 lbs. which was my weight in high school. At this point I was convinced that I might have a hidden cancer. I thought about getting a CT-Scan of my abdomen, but I didn't want my friends to know about my concerns.

As an alternative to the CT-Scan, I decided to simply increase my caloric intake. I ate larger than normal meals, and snacked more vigorously between meals. Within two weeks I was able to get my weight back to normal. I have now learned that I must eat larger meals as long as I continue to work out vigorously. Being able to eat more and still maintain a healthy body weight is not a bad problem to have. I am convinced this will work for anyone who is willing to commit to some relatively simple dietary changes and a reasonable exercise program.

There is more to this story that I want to share with my readers. In subsequent issues of "Ask the Doctor" I would like to outline the explanation for the chia seed diet. Additionally, I will outline a more comprehensive diet that will not only give you more strength and energy, but provide you with protection from breast and colon cancer and reduce your risk for diverticulitis.

Feel free to Ask The Doctor if you have any questions, or you can contact us.