

## A Focus on Flax



Picture from [www.wigglesworthfibres.com](http://www.wigglesworthfibres.com)

The flax plant is a 3-to-4-foot tall grass or reed with purple-blue flowers. It's probably the oldest plant cultivated by man, and among the most versatile. Different parts of the plant can be used to make fabric, dye, paper, medicines, fishing nets and soap. The flax plant is also popular as a garden ornamental. The fabric linen is woven from flax fibers. In fact, Egyptian noblewoman wore linen shifts. Linseed oil produced from flax seed is a commercial solvent used as a drying oil for paints.

Today, flax is most often associated with the omega-3 fatty acid alpha-linolenic acid. ALA is one of the essential fatty acids the body cannot produce on its own. We have to get it from our diets, but we often don't get enough. The typical American diet has too much omega 6 (think corn oil), and is lacking in omega 3s. That is where flax can come to the rescue.

### What can flax do for you?

Medical researchers and professionals believe it can lower total cholesterol and LDL, the bad cholesterol; reduce blood triglycerides and blood pressure; reduce inflammation, and cut your risk of heart attack by keeping platelets from becoming sticky.

But wait, there's more. Flax seed is low in carbohydrates and loaded with protein, vitamins and minerals. It provides Vitamin C, Vitamins B1, B2, Niacin, B6, Pantothenic Acid, Folic Acid and Biotin, plus calcium, copper, iron, magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, potassium, sodium, and zinc. And, it's a great source of soluble fiber, which is good news for the digestive tract.

### Did you know that flax can be brain food, too?

Remember your mom telling you that fish is brain food? Well the same applies to flax, because omega-3s play a key role in proper brain-cell function and in balancing mood-regulating neurotransmitters.

Note that many nutritionists recommend consuming flax seeds rather than flax oil because the seeds offer the added benefits of fiber and lignan (an antioxidant phytoestrogen). From a nutritional standpoint, you can use golden or brown flax seeds.

### How do you use flax seed?

Don't consume the seeds whole. Grind them into meal that you can add to your

food and recipes. You can purchase flax meal that is already ground, but to make sure it stays fresh longer, you may want to purchase the seeds and grind them yourself (using a coffee bean grinder or a blender). Store the seeds in a cool dark place, or the refrigerator and grind them as needed. Keep the meal in the refrigerator or freezer and use it within a few weeks.

Add flax meal to yogurt, egg dishes, ground meats, salads, soups, smoothies, etc. Flax meal can also be used in baked goods such as muffins or pancakes as a substitute for eggs. (You would use 1 tablespoon of ground flax seed and 3 tablespoons of water in place of 1 egg.)

### How much flax is enough?

Medical practitioners recommend about two tablespoons daily, of either ground flax seed or flax oil, added to your food.

As with any dietary change, it's a good idea to contact your doctor or a registered dietitian before you begin a flax regimen. Don't substitute flax for prescription medications you are taking. And, you should not take flax if you have a bleeding disorder and type 2 diabetes, are pregnant, have endometriosis, or are at risk for prostate cancer.

## You Must Remember This

Your keys show up in the refrigerator. You totally forget to pick up your son at band practice. You can't recall the name of your favorite restaurant.



Are you losing it completely? Most likely not. And, the least effective thing you can do is stress over your diminished mental powers.

Here are some simple positive actions and strategies that can help you keep those mental juices flowing:

### 1. **Think positively**

Yes, aging can slow some of your cognitive abilities and make it more of a challenge to learn new things. But, research indicates that people do poorly on memory activities after hearing negative messages about aging and memory.

### 2. **Give your brain some help**

Don't try to keep it all "up here." Use calendars, shopping lists, Post-its, a chalkboard. Find a system that helps you organize information you need. Keep keys, glasses and checkbook in a designated basket or drawer.

### 3. **Enlist your senses**

When you meet someone, say their name out loud. Write down things you want to remember or draw a picture. Create a visual image of errands. If you need

to pick up milk and get the dry cleaning, picture a carton of milk wearing a jacket or pants.

### 4. **Exercise your mind**

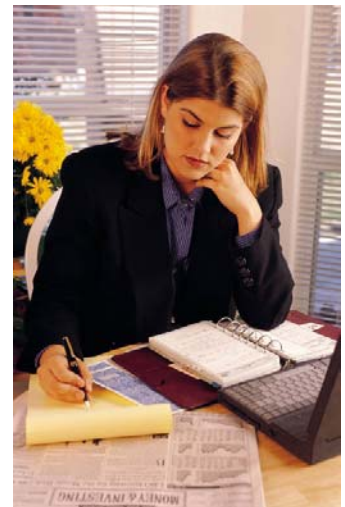
Take on activities that require concentration and memory skills. Join a book club, do crosswords, try a new hobby or take an evening course – maybe ballroom dancing?

### 5. **Exercise your body**

Aerobic activity has been found to increase brain volume along with heart capacity. Jog or kickbox for your head *and* your body.

### 6. **Do one thing at a time**

Multitasking makes it harder to remember new things. Memory researchers note that new information is generally processed by the cerebral cortex. When you try to do several things at once, however, the brain shifts to the striatum, where fewer details are stored. As the experts point out, this is an easy fix: Pay attention.



### 7. **Learn to meditate**

It's probably not surprising that meditation can enhance memory as well as reduce stress.

## Getting to Know Copper

Copper is one of the trace minerals important to key body functions. It plays a role in healing wounds, keeping calcium in the bones when you diet, assisting in the transport of oxygen to body tissues, developing firm skin, bones and connective tissue and converting glucose into energy. A shortage of copper in the body can result in fatigue and shortness of breath. The mineral is becoming an increasing focus of research because of its potential importance in anti-aging and cancer prevention.

You can find copper in dark chocolate, liver, shellfish, legumes, nuts, seeds, whole grains, potatoes, dark leafy greens, dried fruits such as prunes, black pepper, and yeast. According to USDA, the recommended daily allowance for adults (RDA) is 900 micrograms. One ounce of dark chocolate will supply 200 mcg of copper and one ounce of walnuts will provide 450 mcg.

