

What you 'oat' to eat – and a recipe to show you how!

By Chris Mantle Senior Food and Health Development Worker of Edinburgh Community Food

Last month in The Edinburgh Reporter we looked at beans and pulses, often over-looked foods which are really healthy and good for us. They are great for protein, iron, calcium and fibre amongst other things, are widely and cheaply available and can also be used in many different ways. So, continuing with the theme, let's look at another potential 'superfood', the humble oat.

The traditional Scottish diet gets some flack at times for being a little dull and, well, unhealthy, with its emphasis on salt, fat, cream & frying and its general lack of vegetable matter (other than kale). However it's not all bad news as we historically ate large amounts of grains, pulses, fish, shell fish and of course oats in their various forms. Oats remain an important part of our modern diet too, with their inclusion in breakfast cereals, many biscuits, cakes and cereal bars plus of course oatcakes and porridge! And unlike other grains such as wheat and rice, we have never refined them meaning that they retain all their natural goodness.

So what makes oats so wonderful? Firstly, they are an excellent source of various types of fibre. As we saw last week, fibre not only keeps us regular and reduces bowel cancer it is also very filling and helps us to digest sugars healthily, reduces blood pressure and helps keep our blood sugar on an even keel. Pulses can make an excellent contribution to our needs and oats are another fantastic source, with a typical 50 gram serving giving us 20% of our daily requirements.

Fibre can also help us to reduce our cholesterol. High cholesterol in the body has been shown to increase the risk of clogged arteries, heart attacks, strokes & mini-strokes and many people struggle to get their cholesterol levels down. There are a number of foods which are thought to help us do this, one of the best being oats. They contain lots of a special type of fibre called beta-glucan and many studies have indicated that a portion of oats a day can lower cholesterol by up to 23%. Each time our cholesterol goes down by 1% our risk of having a heart attack actually goes down by 2%. So that would mean a bowl of porridge a day could reduce our risk of heart attack by nearly 50%! However they may also help our heart health in other ways as oats are high in a unique type of anti-oxidant which – not to get too technical – suppresses various molecules in our bodies thought to increase risk of strokes and heart disease.

Secondly, the beta-glucan in oats may have other benefits for our health. Some studies show that it can help the way our bodies respond to bacterial infections and others demonstrate that it can help keep blood-sugar levels stable in people with diabetes type 2. Oat fibre – in common with other types of fibre – may also play a role in protecting older women from breast cancer. Women who eat the most fibre lower their risk by 50% compared to those who eat the least.

Oats do contain some vitamins in modest amounts, with the best being B1. However, thirdly, it is when we come to minerals that they really shine, with good levels of nearly all minerals (including the powerful anti-oxidant selenium) and very high levels of manganese (which is vital for our bones). Usefully for vegetarians they are also a good source of both iron and protein.

So, with all this in mind how can we include more oats in our diet? Firstly, we should note that they are cheap with a kilogram (roughly two lb) costing around £1. A typical serving of porridge contains 50 grams or about 2 ounces (just be aware

that instant porridge brands may contain rather a lot of added sugar). If starting the day with a bowl of porridge isn't quite your thing how about trying no-added-sugar muesli? You can easily make your own too by simply mixing oats with any dried fruit, some raw nuts and seeds and topping with fresh fruit and a sprinkling of cinnamon. Or you could try making your own granola. Oatcakes make a great and filling snack throughout the day or can be eaten with a main meal such as stovies. This versatile grain can be used to thicken sauces, bind burgers & meatballs or used as a coating for fish instead of breadcrumbs (see recipe below). Adding oats to minced meat will make it go further. Try a ratio of 1 part oats to 5 parts meat. And of course there is always skirlie! Oats are also very handy for baking and can be used in crumbles, muffins, biscuits and flapjack.

Herring in Oatmeal

Ingredients:

- Two boned herring fillets per person
- Coarse oatmeal
- Black pepper
- Cooking oil
- Lemon juice

Method:

1. Sprinkle the fillets with black pepper and then toss in a plastic bag with the oatmeal
2. Gently fry the coated fish skin side upwards until lightly browned, then turn and cook the other side for a total of roughly seven minutes.
3. Drain fish on kitchen roll to remove excess oil.
4. Drizzle with a little lemon juice and garnish with fresh parsley.
5. Serve with boiled potatoes and vegetable side of your choice

Submitted by [Chris Mantle](#)

