

Psyllium the Hidden Superfood of all Times **Sukaina Shabbir***

Abstract

Humankind has used Psyllium since ancient times; it has miraculous medicinal properties and health benefits that have been attributed to it throughout the ages. Psyllium is also recognized by few other names like ispaghula, isabgol, psyllium seed husks etc. It is usually cultivated in India and Pakistan. Psyllium is derived from the husks of the *Plantago ovata* plant's seeds. There are various health benefits of consuming psyllium. Its positive effects include relieving the symptoms of constipation as well as mild diarrhea, it improves digestion and cleanse colon, lower hypercholesterolemia, reduces the chances of heart diseases, helps in weight reduction, controls type 2 diabetes, treats inflammatory bowel disease (ulcerative colitis) and hemorrhoids. In food industry it is used in baking as well as a thickening agent in the preparation of ice cream or frozen dessert. In older days it was also applied topically to treat skin problems and insect stings.

Keywords: Psyllium husk; Constipation; Gastro esophageal reflux disease (GERD); Diabetes; Cholesterol

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Introduction

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Psyllium is derived from the husks of the *Plantago ovata* plant's seeds. There are various health benefits of consuming psyllium. Its positive effects include relieving the symptoms of constipation as well as mild diarrhea, it improves digestion and cleanse colon, lower hypercholesterolemia, reduces the chances of heart diseases, helps in weight reduction, controls type 2 diabetes, treats inflammatory bowel disease (ulcerative colitis) and hemorrhoids. In food industry it is used in baking as well as a thickening agent in the preparation of ice cream or frozen dessert. In older days it was also applied topically to treat skin problems and insect stings [1].

Nutrition facts regarding psyllium

Psyllium husk is low in calories, 1 table spoon has only 20 calories and no cholesterol or trans-fat. It has 0.2 gram of protein and very low sodium. It is rich in soluble dietary fiber and 1 table spoon of psyllium has 5 gm. of dietary fiber and this fiber content is primarily responsible for all the benefits psyllium brings to us. Increased soluble fibers intake such as β -glucan or psyllium are

known to have strong evidence for lowering elevated blood lipids to normal healthy levels which leads to reduced coronary heart disease risk [2].

Discussion

Benefits of psyllium husk

There are innumerable health benefits of consuming psyllium husk. But foremost thing which should be considered is that sufficient amount of water should be taken along with psyllium in order to achieve all its positive effects as it absorbs water and become a thick viscous compound which is beneficial in preventing and curing various diseases.

Psyllium as a constipation reliever: Since constipation is the condition in which emptying the bowel becomes very painful, there are few functional food like psyllium that has a laxative effect. Water absorbed by psyllium husk is not absorbed by the intestine resulting in making stools softer and bulkier leading to a smooth defecation process [3]. When patients with Type 2 Diabetes who had chronic constipation were administered with psyllium supplementation had overall positive health benefits including decreased constipation symptoms, body weight, glycemic, cholesterol, and increased HDL Cholesterol levels [4].

Hemorrhoids and psyllium: In hemorrhoids veins in the walls

of the anus or rectum are dilated, which is usually caused by untreated constipation but sometimes associated with chronic diarrhea. Adequate fiber supplement combined with the TONE method can stop the progression of hemorrhoids and bleeding, and preventing surgery in most patients with advanced haemorrhoids [5].

GERD and psyllium: Gastro esophageal reflux disease, or GERD, is a digestive disorder that affects the lower esophageal sphincter (LES). It has been shown that frequency of symptoms in patients who suffer periodically from Gastro esophageal reflux disease (GERD) with constipation was reduced by the intake of psyllium as compared with omeprazole [6].

Hypocholesterolemic agent: Hypercholesterolemia can increase the risk of heart diseases and other comorbid. Psyllium husk is a natural, serum cholesterol lowering agent as it binds with bile acids in the small intestine and ultimately reduces the absorption of cholesterol [7]. Studies have proved that psyllium fiber supplement is even higher in quality to wheat dextrin for decreasing both low density lipoprotein cholesterol and total cholesterol without having impact on high density lipoprotein cholesterol thus decreasing the risk of coronary vascular disease [8,9].

Diabetes and psyllium: Psyllium is a soluble fiber which forms gel in the intestine which leads to slowing the rate of nutrient absorption and results in lowering postprandial blood glucose level. Diabetic patients are usually advised to modify carbohydrate intake, but it has been observed that patients with type 2 diabetes if consume moderate carbohydrate diet

supplemented with psyllium has better effects on plasma insulin and pro-inflammatory cytokines [10]. Improvement in the metabolic syndrome (MetS) profile of newly diagnosed type 2 diabetic patients was observed when psyllium was consumed in combination to the normal diet [11].

Hypertension and psyllium: Psyllium, soluble fiber is part of a healthy diet and exerts a protective effect in normalizing the blood pressure. Observational studies show that when fiber is increased in diet (by 7–15 g/day above the usual levels) is significantly associated with reduced blood pressure and hypertension risk compared to the low fiber intake in Western diets [12]. Consumption of soluble fiber is proved to reduce overall Systolic Blood Pressure (SBP) and diastolic blood pressure (DBP) in all populations, and especially psyllium fiber helps to reduce overall SBP [13,14].

Conclusion

In conclusion there are many hidden benefits of Psyllium husk. If taken in an appropriate amount according to RDA it can be a part of our regular diet. Few things should be considered while consuming psyllium. First of all water intake should be increased, in order to take full advantage and secondly it is sometimes observed that supplements of psyllium can have side effect like stomach cramps, bloating or flatulence and even allergic reactions, if any of the condition happens one should seek for medical assistance. Increased fiber intake is consistently associated with better health, reduced chronic disease risk, and healthy aging even when initiated in mid-life (ages 45–65 years).

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