



LINSEED LINSEED LINSEED

all the goodness of

Optimise your omega intake and balance your body! Durwin Banks explains why he feels linseed oil is the essential fat to heal our nation...

When out on a ramble in our green and pleasant land, you may come across fields of gold, red, or even purple. Yet if a field of blue catches your eye, you may be unwittingly admiring a field of fat. The wonderful blue blossom of linseed, which decorates our countryside so beautifully, also provides important essential fats for us to use within our diet. Essential fats are so called because our bodies do not produce them; they have to be included in the food we eat.

In the past, linseed oil was used in a variety of industrial and domestic products. It was most commonly used to make linoleum, a floor covering. Interestingly, linoleum has antibacterial properties, which made it a particularly good choice for hospital floors. It seems that as other materials have become more frequently used, the greater the problem of infection control has become in our hospitals.

The widespread use of linseed oil to make linoleum gave rise to a very valuable by-product: linseed oil cake. Farmers used to mix this with cereals to feed their animals. As a result, the livestock were far better fed and showed more of a resemblance to the wild animals we used to hunt in ancient times, as well as having a far better balance of essential fats for us. Sadly, as linoleum started being replaced by vinyl and other materials in the 1950s, the practice dwindled. There are still some examples of it today, for instance, the promotion of omega-3 eggs, produced by chickens given linseed oil within their feed.

all change...

Changes to how livestock are fed, and the influence of industrial food producers, has altered our nutritional intake. At least £10bn of our hard-earned tax money is currently spent treating diet-related illness in the NHS. If there was more of an understanding about the importance of oils and fats in the body, we would be better able to construct healthier eating habits.

Essential fats produced by linseed are omega-3 and omega-6. Linseed oil also contains omega-9 which is just as beneficial but as it can be produced by the body, it isn't considered as an essential fat. All these fats play a vital role within our bodies.

A balance of them makes up each cell membrane; everything depends on the balance of fats for our cells to be able to function and to allow these building blocks in our body to 'communicate' with each other. Omega-3 and omega-6 are also the precursors to all the hormones the body makes. Omega-3 makes anti-inflammatory hormones and omega-6 makes pro-inflammatory hormones. So what ailments are caused by a lack of essential fats? Many begin with inflammation! The most commonly associated illness is probably arthritis, but a lack of essential fats is also related to heart disease, disordered brain function and high blood pressure, to name but a few.

balancing act

Currently the most widely used oils are sunflower, soya, corn and rapeseed, which are high in omega-6. This use contributes to the imbalance of fats in the body. However, lesser-known oils, like linseed, also contain omega-6 but have a much larger quantity of omega-3 and seem to help balance our bodies.

Linseed oil is often labelled as 'flax' or 'flaxseed oil', so keep that in mind when out shopping or ordering online. Flax is actually a fibre plant used to make linen. Although some products on our supermarket shelves state that they contain omega-3, there is no way of knowing whether any heating process has occurred. Heating inhibits the fat's capacity to be beneficial! Therefore, rarer oils such as linseed must be fresh and are ideally used as a dressing for vegetables, added to pasta or mash. This way the goodness in the oil will not be destroyed.

The average person in good health will only need a dessert spoon a day and it's very important to refrigerate the oil and use

it regularly. If left for too long, the oil can become rancid. This is when the oil should be used for cricket bats or woodwork - not you! So consume your bottle within two months so it doesn't go to waste.

awareness is key

Unfortunately, our bodies do not have a dipstick like a car to check the balance of our oil, so our only warning that levels are low is when things start to go wrong. To be aware of the oils and fats that go into the body is a crucial part of living a healthy life. Essential fats truly are essential and incorporating them in our diets is vital.

So, when passing by these blue fields of fat, let the pretty flowers remind you of the positive impact this plant can bestow.

Durwin Banks, owner of High Barn Oils, supplies linseed oil from his family-owned farm in West Sussex. www.highbarnoils.co.uk



rarer oils such as linseed

must be fresh and are

ideally used as a dressing

for vegetables, added

to pasta or mash.