

Chia is familiar to most of us as a seed used with clay animals that sprout seeds covering their bodies. However, the *Salvia Hispanica* seed marketed under its common name “Chia” is also sold under several trademarks including “Salba”, “Mila” and “Sachia” to name a few (each claiming superior nutritional values over the others). *Salvia Hispanica* appears to be a super food that contains easily digestible protein, essential fatty acids, particularly omega-3, vitamins, soluble fiber, antioxidants and minerals.

For centuries this tiny little seed was used as a staple by the Aztec Indians and known as the “running food” due to its high endurance energy qualities. Indians running from the Colorado River to the California coast to trade turquoise for seashells are said to have only brought the Chia seed for nourishment.

High in soluble fiber the Chia fiber turns to gelatin if left to sit in water. Researchers believe this gel-forming occurrence takes place in the stomach and creates a physical barrier between carbohydrates and the digestive enzymes that break them down, thus slowing the conversion of carbohydrates into sugar. Chia seeds have the ability to absorb more than 12 times its weight in water, thereby offering the ability to prolong hydration.

As a source of protein, the Chia, is digested and absorbed very easily which results in rapid transport to the tissues and utilization by the cells. Another unique quality of the Chia seed is its high oil content, and is touted as the highest known whole food source of Omega 3 fatty acids with an unusually good ratio of omega-3 oil to omega-6 oil.

Chia, as an ingredient, is a dream food. There are limitless ways to incorporate the Chia seed into your diet. Chia may be eaten raw as a dietary fiber and omega-3 supplement. Chia seeds soaked in water or fruit juice is known in Mexico as *chia fresca*. Many like to add Chia to their daily smoothie or sprinkle the seeds on top of oatmeal or in puddings. Ground chia seed is used in baked goods including breads and cakes. Chia gel can also be used as a fat replacer in many baking recipes.

If you are interested in learning more about Chia, read “The Magic of Chia. Revival of an Ancient Wonder Food” by James F. Scheer or “Chia: Rediscovering the Forgotten Crop of the Aztecs” by Ayerza and Coates.