ARE HEMP SEEDS SAFE AND HEALTHY FOR CHILDREN?

By Dr. Tracy Darling, MD

It’s no secret that a healthy and strong child requires the best quality foods. It’s also no secret that toddlers can be picky about what they eat. Bombarded with commercials and influenced by what their friends eat, even at a young age, they will follow fads and only eat certain “foods.”¹ So what’s a parent to do? As a doctor and mother, I found that the best I could do, short of force-feeding my children, was to find foods that are nutrient-rich and calorie light, something that you can add in to their favorite meals to make sure they are getting enough nutrients to grow healthy without extra calories or unhealthy fats.

Because they contain a high level of protein and the ideal ratio of Omega-3s, 6s and 9s (i.e., all of the essential fatty acids), I found hemp seeds to be an excellent source of such nutrition. Moreover, shelled hemp seeds have a delightful nutty taste, while toasted and salted in-the-shell hemp seeds provide the same with a nice crunch. And despite repeated misinformation in the press, hemp is different from marijuana. Though from the same genus (i.e., Sativa L.), they are as different as a St. Bernard is from a Chihuahua: they are both dogs, but they would never be mistaken for one another.

**Complete Source of Protein**

Growing children need and must eat enough protein in their diet. Protein helps to promote correct development and growth. How much is “enough”? A school age child needs approximately 13 grams of protein each and every day. Hemp seeds provide around 11 grams in 3 tablespoons, which is almost 100% of their recommended daily requirement. And because it also contains all of the essential fatty acids, it is known as a “complete” protein.

**Source of Essential Fatty Acids**

Hemp seeds contain a high level of fat. 3 tablespoons will provide 13-15 grams of fat, most of which is beneficial fat. For example, Salute D’Oro Shelled Hemp Seeds have 15 grams of fat in 3 tablespoons, 12 of which are Omega-3s and Omega-6s in the ideal 3:1 ratio, and an additional 1.5 grams of monounsaturated fat. While our typical western diet is much too high in Omega-6s, which is detrimental to health, the typical hemp seed’s ratio of Omega-3 to Omega-6 fatty acids is ideal to promote brain development, growth and a healthy body. Omega-3 is also excellent for reducing the risks of heart diseases and cancer. It also reduces inflammation.

¹ Remember that just because you eat it doesn’t mean it’s “food.”
Source of Iron

In general, hemp seeds provide some 3 milligrams of iron per 3 tablespoons. A growing child needs approximately 7 milligrams of iron every day. Iron is a mineral essential for the mobility of oxygen through their bodies via the bloodstream, promoting healthy brain development. As with the proteins, it also helps to promote healthy growth and development. In the US, research indicates that children are one of the highest risk groups for not receiving enough iron.

Source of Zinc

Hemp seeds also contain zinc, another essential mineral in the development of your children. 3 tablespoons will contain approximately 3.5 milligrams, more than a growing child’s daily needs. Zinc is a mineral essential for proper growth and development. It is also excellent at helping to heal wounds. Children get cuts and scratches; it’s a part of growing up. Correct zinc levels will also help with the immune system, promoting a speedy recovery from illnesses.

Finding a Reputable Provider

Hemp has been grown for millennia as a source, among other things, of food. But not all hemp seeds are created equal, nor are they cultivated and processed in the same manner. Find a provider who offers organic hemp seeds, or at least guarantees that the seeds have been grown with the use of pesticides, herbicides and insecticides. Depending on your child’s immune system, it may also be important to select a provider that process the hemp seeds in a facility dedicated exclusively to hemp, so that no cross-contamination with common allergens (e.g., peanuts) is possible. If you’re buying other hemp seed foods (e.g., hemp seed oil, a tasty and nutty culinary and tasting oil with a healthier profile than even olive oil), choose a provider that processes and packages the seeds in an oxygen free environment to prevent early oxidization. The seeds must also be pressed at temperatures lower than 50C (the lower the better). A reputable provider should provide you with a complete chemical analysis of your product, including a profile of THC (the psychoactive compound present in marijuana) which should show no detectable traces of this or any other chemical.

Full Disclosure: I am a member of the Board of Advisors of EcoStar Health, Inc., a provider of Salute D’Oro premium hemp seed foods, including premium shelled hemp seeds and in-the-shell toasted and Italian-sea salted hemp seeds, which I recommend for those who feed their families only top-notch food…REAL food!