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ASK DR. ETINGIN



Q I hear that flaxseed can help prevent cancer and treat menopausal symptoms. Is this true?

A Flaxseed (also known as linseed) and flax oil have been herbal remedies for centuries, and are used in Europe to ease gastrointestinal upsets, constipation (it's a soluble fiber), and even sore throats. Today, scientists are studying the dozens of chemicals in flax to see whether they can help prevent breast and colon cancer, and other diseases. Flax may be beneficial in several ways. It contains plant chemicals called *lignans*, which animal studies suggest have anti-tumor properties. Flaxseed also contains *alpha-linolenic acid (ALA)* one of the beneficial omega-3 fatty acids (like those found in certain fish), which lowers harmful LDL cholesterol and raises "good" HDL cholesterol. (Flax oil is similar to canola, olive, and walnut oils.) Flaxseed is also rich in plant estrogens, called isoflavones, also found in soy (lignans also have estrogen-like properties). Some studies suggest adding flaxseed to your diet can help ease hot flashes. Since flax is healthy, and can be used in baking and other recipes, it's certainly worth a try.

Red clover doesn't quench hot flashes

Red clover supplements—supposedly rich in plant estrogens—have been marketed as aids in reducing menopausal symptoms like hot flashes. But two double-blind, placebo-controlled studies among 80 peri- and postmenopausal women found that the supplements were no better than dummy pills in reducing hot flashes. A review of recent data on red clover, published in the December 2001 issue of the journal *Menopause*, did not find any demonstrable benefits to taking the supplements, and the study authors say that red clover's potential estrogenic effects on the breast and uterine lining (as well as a chemical in some species of clover that affects blood clotting) should be studied further.

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