



Try hummus as a healthful spread, dip

Is hummus considered a healthful food? I think it probably is, but I wonder about the fat in it. How is it made?

Even more than most dishes, you can find many, many recipes for hummus. And, of course, changing the ingredients will change the end product's nutritional profile. Still, even with that caveat — yes, hummus is considered a very healthful alternative to other types of spreads and dips.

Hummus is usually served as an appetizer or snack, to be spread on pita bread or pita chips, or used as a vegetable dip. Some people spread hummus on bread for sandwiches.

For the uninitiated, hummus is a staple in Middle Eastern dishes. Its main ingredient is chickpeas (also known as garbanzo beans), blended with other ingredients in a food processor until it becomes a smooth paste. Recipes almost always include tahini (or sesame seed paste, usually available in the ethnic section of your grocery store), and also commonly call for garlic, lemon juice, olive oil, and a variety of spices and other flavorings. You can also find recipes that include additional ingredients, such as sun-dried tomatoes, spinach or olives.

You can buy prepared hummus, too. Again, the nutritional profile will change according to the ingredients used, so check the Nutrition Facts label for specific information. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Na-

tional Nutrient Database offers general information for both commercial and home-prepared hummus. A quick comparison of the two shows that the specific kinds analyzed have about the same number of calories (about 50 in two tablespoons) and fat (about two grams), but the commercial type has more protein, fewer carbohydrates, and more fiber, phosphorus, potassium and folate. The home-prepared hummus analyzed for the database has more calcium, vitamin C and less sodium.

But, like anything, you have to watch your portions to be certain hummus fits into a healthful diet. If you can't contain yourself to a two-tablespoon serving and serve up a half-cup instead, you'll be treating yourself to more than 200 calories and 10 to 12 grams of fat.

If you're substituting hummus for a sour-cream-based dip or mayonnaise-based spread, of course you'll be better off. Not only does hummus offer more protein and less fat, the fat it does contain comes from the olive oil and tahini — both of which are chock-full of heart-healthy monounsaturated fat rather than saturated fat, which should be limited.

With hummus, as with anything in the diet, the key is balance and portion control. Remember that, and you can enjoy eating just about anything.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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By Martha Filipic
(614) 292-9833
filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu

Editor:

This column was reviewed by Jaime Foster, registered dietitian and program specialist for Ohio State University Extension in the Department of Human Nutrition, College of Education and Human Ecology.

To receive Chow Line by e-mail, send a message to filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu or sign up at <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~news/subscribe.php>.

**Section of Communications
and Technology
News and Media Relations**
2021 Coffey Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1044
(614) 292-2011

208 Research Services
Building
1680 Madison Ave.
Wooster, OH 44691-4096
(330) 263-3780

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