Are Graham Crackers Healthy?

2015-09-24 20:25:57 by Dr_Kristie

Supermarket shelves are piled high with cookies and crackers, most of them loaded with sugar, saturated fat, and hydrogenated oils. To the average person, a graham cracker sounds like a wholesome alternative to other sweet and crunchy, but decidedly "bad for you," cookie and cracker options. So, when a health-minded person reaches the cookie aisle and tosses a box of Graham crackers in their cart, they feel virtuous. After all, they left the chocolate chip cookies on the shelf. Are shoppers who buy Graham crackers making a smart choice? Are graham crackers healthy and a good alternative to the standard cookie?



What's in a Graham Cracker?

Graham crackers date back to the mid 1800s. These popular cookies that have stood the test of time were the brain child of a minister who developed it as a "bland food" to help curb sexual urges. Despite these rather unconventional beginning, Graham crackers are a cookie people of all ages snack on even today.

Back in the early days of the Graham cracker, they were made using Graham flour, a coarsely textured whole-wheat flour. Times have changed. Most Graham cracker manufacturers today use processed, white flour rather than the whole-wheat variety that went into Graham crackers last century. This, of course, reduces their fiber content and makes them a less healthy cookie alternative.

Are Graham Crackers Healthy: Other Drawbacks to Eating Graham Crackers

Another problem with commercial graham crackers is most of them are made with large amounts of sugar or honey or, even worse, sweetened with high fructose corn syrup to cut costs. High fructose corn syrup is controversial. Some studies show fructose increases the risk of diabetes and obesity. On the plus side, Graham crackers are relatively low in calories and fat and you can find low-fat Graham crackers at most supermarkets.

Eat Graham Crackers, but Choose the Right Ones

When you have an overwhelming craving for a cookie, a Graham cracker is a better choice than most cookies, although hardly a health food. You can make the Graham cracker a healthier option by choosing ones made with whole-wheat flour, not white, bleached flour - and avoiding cookies with high fructose corn syrup or large amounts of sugar. Some health food stores and natural food markets carry "healthier" versions of Graham crackers with no hydrogenated oils, high fructose corn syrup, or artificial preservatives. Look for one that lists "whole wheat" as the first ingredient and has less than 8 grams of sugar per serving. Even then, eat them in moderation.

The Bottom Line?

Choose your Graham crackers carefully and this popular snack cookie can be a healthier alternative to conventional cookies but eat them only in moderation. Watch out! They can be addictive.

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