

What are the health benefits of pumpkins?

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Benefits Nutrition Diet

Many people think of pumpkins as little more than a Halloween decoration or a Thanksgiving pie filling. However, it may be time to rethink this plump, nutritious orange plant.

Pumpkin is a highly nutrient-dense food. It is rich in vitamins and minerals but low in calories. Pumpkin seeds, leaves, and juices all pack a powerful nutritional punch.

There are many ways pumpkin can be incorporated into desserts, soups, salads, preserves, and even as a substitute for butter. A range of pumpkin products is available for purchase online.

This MNT Knowledge Center feature is part of a collection of articles on the health benefits of popular foods. It will explore the health benefits and nutritional content of pumpkins, as well as ways to include more in the diet.

Fast facts on pumpkins

- The potassium contained within pumpkins can have a positive effect on blood pressure.
- The antioxidants in pumpkin could help prevent degenerative damage to the eyes.
- Avoid canned pumpkin pie mix, as it typically contains added sugars and syrups.
- Uncut pumpkins should be stored in a cool, dark place for up to 2 months.
- Pumpkin puree or canned pumpkin can be used as a replacement for butter or oil in baking recipes.

Possible health benefits

Pumpkin has a range of fantastic health benefits, including being one of the best-known sources of beta-carotene.

Beta-carotene is a powerful antioxidant. It also gives orange vegetables and fruits their vibrant color. The body converts any ingested beta-carotene into vitamin A.

Consuming foods rich in beta-carotene may reduce the risk of developing certain types of cancer, offer protection against asthma and heart disease, and delay aging and body degeneration.

Many studies have suggested that eating more plant foods such as pumpkin decreases the risk of obesity and overall mortality. It can also help prevent diabetes and heart disease, and promote a healthy complexion and hair, increased energy, and a healthful body mass index (BMI).

Pumpkins are also a powerful source of fiber.



Pumpkins have a range of proven health benefits.

They have demonstrated the following health benefits.

Regulating blood pressure

Eating pumpkin is good for the heart. The fiber, potassium, and vitamin C content in pumpkin all support heart health.

Studies suggest that consuming enough potassium may be almost as important as decreasing sodium intake for the treatment of hypertension, or high blood pressure. Decreasing sodium intake involves eating meals that contain little or no salt.

Increased potassium intake is also associated with a reduced risk of stroke, protection against loss of muscle mass, and preservation of bone mineral density.

Reducing the risk of cancer

Research has suggested a positive relationship between a diet rich in beta-carotene and a reduced risk of prostate cancer.

Beta-carotene has also been shown to hold back the development of colon cancer in some of the Japanese population.

The authors of the study concluded:

"We found a statistically significant inverse association between higher plasma lycopene [a type of beta-carotene] concentrations and lower risk of prostate cancer, which was restricted to older participants and those without a family history of prostate cancer."

Pumpkins contain a wealth of antioxidants. Vitamin C, vitamin E, and beta-carotene have been shown to support eye health and prevent degenerative damage.

A cross-sectional study of older African-American women showed that eating 3 or more fruit servings per day was associated with a decreased risk of age-related macular degeneration. It also led to slower progression of the disease.

Combating diabetes

Pumpkin helps to control diabetes.

The plant compounds in pumpkin seeds and pulp are excellent for helping the absorption of glucose into the tissues and intestines, as well as balancing levels of liver glucose.

They may be associated with a lower risk of type 2 diabetes, but this effect is not consistently demonstrated. However, the compounds have such an impact that researchers suggest that they could be reworked into an anti-diabetic medication, though further studies are needed.



Pumpkins have a powerful effect on glucose absorption. This can help keep diabetes at bay.

Daily fiber content

Pumpkins are a fantastic source of fiber. People in the United States (U.S.) do not consume enough fiber, with an average daily intake of just 15 g. The recommended daily fiber intake is between 25 and 30 g.

Fiber slows the rate of sugar absorption into the blood, as well as promoting regular bowel movements and smooth digestion. A healthful fiber intake can also help reduce the risk of colon cancer.

With nearly 3 grams (g) of fiber in cooked, fresh pumpkin and over 7 g in canned pumpkin, adding a serving of pumpkin to the daily diet can help supplement the fiber shortage in the average American diet.

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Dietary fiber is crucial for digestion. [Click here to discover why.](#)

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Immune health

Pumpkin can protect immunity.

Pumpkin pulp and seeds are high in both vitamin C and beta-carotene. These offer a boost to the immune system using a powerful combination of nutrients.

Beta-carotene is converted into vitamin A. This triggers the creation of white blood cells that fight infection.

Nutritional breakdown

According to the *USDA National Nutrient Database*, one cup of cooked, boiled, or drained pumpkin without salt contains:

- 1.76 g of protein
- 2.7 g of fiber
- 49 calories
- 0.17 g of fat
- 0 g of cholesterol
- 12.01 g of carbohydrate

This amount of pumpkin also provides:

- more than 200 percent of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of vitamin A
- nineteen percent of the RDA of vitamin C

- ten percent or more of the RDA of vitamin E, riboflavin, potassium, copper, and manganese
- at least 5 percent of thiamin, B-6, folate, pantothenic acid, niacin, iron, magnesium, and phosphorus

Preparing fresh pumpkin at home will deliver the most benefits for your health, but canned pumpkin is also a great choice. Pumpkin retains many of its health benefits in the canning process.

Steer clear of canned pumpkin pie mix. This is usually placed next to the canned pumpkin in grocery stores, and is sold in a similar can. It contains added sugars and syrups.

Canned pumpkin should have only one ingredient: Pumpkin.

How to incorporate pumpkin into your diet

There is a range of ways to eat more pumpkin.

Although the variety of pumpkins that usually ends up carved into a jack-o-lantern is perfectly edible, it is best to cook with the sweeter and smaller sweet or pie pumpkin varieties.

Make sure the pumpkin has a few inches of stem left and is hard and heavy for its size. Store uncut pumpkins in a cool, dark place for up to 2 months.

Here are some simple tips for including pumpkin in your diet:

- Make your own pumpkin puree instead of buying canned.
- Use pumpkin puree or canned pumpkin in place of oil or butter in any baking recipe.



Pumpkin pie is a sweeter way to incorporate the benefits of pumpkin into the diet. Be sure to make a pumpkin puree rather than buying pre-made.

- Make a quick treat of pumpkin chocolate yogurt by combining Greek yogurt, pumpkin puree or canned pumpkin, honey, cinnamon, and cocoa powder.

Registered dietitians recommend these blueberry pumpkin oat muffin, pumpkin power smoothie, and pumpkin pie recipes.

Next time pumpkin season comes around, don't carve it up. Cook it and eat it.

A range of pumpkin products, including seeds, puree, and oil, is available for purchase online.

Written by Megan Ware RDN LD

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Additional information

Article last updated by Tim Newman on Fri 5 January 2018.

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