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Turnip Greens Nutrition, Benefits & How to Cook Them!

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TURNIP GREENS Nutrition, Benefits & **HOW TO COOK THEM!**



Dr. Axe
FOOD IS MEDICINE

Like all leafy greens, turnip greens are highly nutritious and offer a variety of health benefits through their supply of vitamins, minerals and **antioxidants**. Turnip greens nutrition is most researched in regards to its ability to fight inflammation, which can lead to the development of such chronic diseases as heart disease and cancer. Turnip plants, which have the scientific name *Brassica rapa*, belong to the **cruciferous** (or Cruciferae) plant family, a nutrient-dense group of vegetables that includes other disease-fighters like kale, broccoli, **cauliflower** and cabbage.

Even though the starchy white root of the turnip plant tends to be more popular, the green leaves of turnips are actually where most of the nutrients are found. One study investigating turnip greens nutrition found that, by far, the greatest proportion of vitamins and minerals in turnip plants are found within the greens – with about 96 percent of the plant's carotene (vitamin A) and about 84 percent of the B vitamins being stored inside the leaf blades. (1)

Some of the areas where turnip greens nutrition really stand out: cancer prevention, bone health and anti-inflammatory abilities. Turnip greens nutrition help to boost the body's detox system, improve **liver** function, boost immunity and fight disease by lowering **free radical** damage and reducing **inflammation** that is often at the root of many chronic diseases.

Turnip Greens Nutrition Facts

Turnip greens contain an impressive range of important antioxidants, including one in particular that offers many disease-fighting benefits: glucosinolate. The

amount of glucosinolate found in turnip greens actually beats the quantity in many other leafy greens and cruciferous vegetables – including nutrient powerhouses like **kale** and collards.

Glucosinolate, a large group of sulfur-containing glucoside molecules, is known for its **cancer**-fighting abilities because it facilitates healthy cell production (mitosis) and stimulates cell-death (apoptosis) within cancerous human tumors. (2) Two key glucosinolates that have been identified in studies regarding turnip greens nutrition? Gluconasturtiin and glucotropaeolin, which are responsible for many of its health benefits.

Turnip greens are also a great source of many other vitamins and minerals – including vitamin K, vitamin A, vitamin C and calcium. Ounce-for-ounce, a look into turnip greens nutrition shows that turnip greens contain roughly 10 times the amount of vitamin A than cabbage does, and about 10 times the amount of calcium than cauliflower!

One cup of cooked turnip greens contains about: (3)

- 29 calories
 - 0 grams fat
 - 5 grams fiber
 - 5 grams protein
 - Less than 1 gram sugar
 - 529 milligrams **vitamin K** (662%)
 - 549 milligrams **vitamin A** (220%)
 - 5 milligrams **vitamin C** (66%)
 - 179 milligrams **folate** (42%)
 - .48 milligrams manganese (24%)
 - 197 milligrams **calcium** (20%)
 - .36 milligrams copper (18%)
 - 7 milligrams **vitamin E** (14%)
 - .26 milligrams vitamin B6 (13%)
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Health Benefits of Turnip Greens

Nutrition

1. High Source of Antioxidants

Turnip greens nutrition is especially of interest to disease specialists because of the vast antioxidants present within the plant's leaves. Numerous studies show that diets high in antioxidants from fresh vegetables help to fight against a number of illnesses: heart disease, cancer, **arthritis**, diabetes, autoimmune disease, **Alzheimer's** and Parkinson's diseases.

Antioxidants in turnip greens – including beta carotene, quercetin and myricetin – counteract free radical damage and help to **naturally slow aging**. Turnip greens can help to boost immune function and lower disease risk by reducing rates of oxidative stress, the kind of damage done by uncontrolled levels of free radicals.

2. Fights Cancer

Free radical damage to DNA can alter genetic material located inside of cells, therefore increasing the chance of cancerous cell development. A benefit of turnip greens nutrition is a high source of glucosinolates, which a number of epidemiological studies have identified have an inverse relationship with cancer development, especially colon and rectal cancers. (4)

In animal studies, eating vegetables that contain glucosinolates is associated with lower rates of certain enzyme activities that result in DNA damage and cell mutation, which can lead to cancerous tumor growth. Many more studies show that vitamin A and vitamin C, both highly present in leafy greens like turnip greens, also helps protect the body from cancer.

Studies show that cruciferous and leafy green vegetables are most closely tied to the prevention of bladder cancer, breast cancer, colon cancer, lung cancer, prostate cancer and ovarian cancer.

3. Helps Prevent Heart Disease

Cruciferous vegetable intake is inversely associated with risk of mortality due to **heart disease** in both women and men, according to a 2011 report published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. (5) Moreover, cruciferous vegetable consumption is associated with a reduced risk of total and cardiovascular disease mortality. Turnip greens and other cruciferous vegetables are rich in antioxidants, vitamins, folate, fiber and various phytochemicals that positively affect heart health through multiple biological pathways.

For example, oxidative damage to LDL (low-density lipoprotein, or “bad”) **cholesterol** is believed to be one significant factor in the development of heart disease, but a major benefit of turnip greens nutrition is that it helps to lower LDL cholesterol. Leafy green vegetables are also effective at lowering levels of **high blood pressure**, homocysteine, oxidative stress and inflammation – all of which may contribute to cardiovascular disease, heart attack or stroke.

Folate and fiber are two other nutrients found in turnip greens that make them excellent for protecting cardiovascular health. Folate is an important B vitamin that helps prevent harmful homocysteine build-up within the arteries, while fiber further helps to lower LDL cholesterol levels.

4. Helps Maintain Strong Bones with Vitamin K

Just one cup of cooked turnip greens provides over 600 percent of your daily **vitamin K** needs! This is significant for maintaining bone health and preventing bone breaks because low dietary vitamin K intake is associated

with an increased risk of hip fractures in both men and women. Strong associations exist between dietary vitamin K intake from food sources, such as leafy green vegetables, and healthy bone mineral density.

For example, a 2003 study conducted by researchers of the Human Nutrition Research Center at Tufts University found that women with the lowest levels of vitamin K intake had significantly lower measures of bone mineral density compared to women with the highest vitamin K intakes.

(6)

Especially as someone ages and their bones naturally become thinner, maintaining bone density by eating plenty of whole foods and exercising is important for reducing overall risk of bone breaks, **osteoporosis** and pain.

5. Protects Eye Health

Research on turnip greens nutrition reveals that turnip greens contain carotenoid antioxidants – such as beta-carotene, lutein and zeaxanthin – which protect the eyes. Lutein and zeaxanthin, two major carotenoids in the human macula and retina, are also natural pigments found in various colored fruits and green leafy vegetables. These antioxidants may be protective in the development of eye diseases, like **macular degeneration**, because they absorb damaging blue light that enters the eye.

Although their effects are still unclear, research shows us that because antioxidants block light damage once absorbed, they help reduce effects of light scatter on visual performance and protect against the photochemical reactions that can damage the eye over time. (7)

6. Protects Against Diabetes

Many studies suggest that there is strong benefit to consuming high levels of antioxidants from various vegetables and fruits in order to manage complications from

diabetes. Another benefit of turnip greens nutrition is that its antioxidants can help to defend the body from diabetes and to lessen the risk for complications like eye disorders or heart disease.

High levels of free radicals can lead to damage of cellular enzymes that results in the development of insulin resistance, the primary cause of diabetes and other forms of metabolic syndrome. Free radicals are formed in diabetic patients by glucose oxidation and, as a result, people with diabetes tend to have increased levels of reactive oxygen species (free radicals). Diabetics are more likely to have cataracts, high blood pressure and high cholesterol, as well as struggle with inflammation and weight gain – but antioxidants can help to control these conditions by lowering oxidative stress. (8)

7. Prevents Cognitive Decline

Oxidative damage to fatty nerve tissue is associated with a higher risk for various forms of nervous system and brain disorders, including Alzheimer's disease and dementia. One of turnip greens' key antioxidant groups, called sulforaphanes, protect brain health and cognitive function because they have cyto-protective effects against oxidative stress.

In animal studies, when rats were given the kind of sulforaphane found in cruciferous vegetables in extract form and then exposed to high levels of oxidative stress within the cortex and hippocampus regions of the brain, they experienced significant neuro-protective effects compared to other rats that were not given sulforaphane. (9)

Importance of Turnip Greens in History

The exact origins of turnip greens are not exactly known, but some evidence shows that turnip greens were first domesticated in ancient Greek, Hellenistic and Roman times. Archaeological records show that

mustard greens and radishes, two crops related to turnips, were both growing wild in parts of western Asia and Europe thousands of years ago, suggesting that this is where turnips first started to grow. Other sources date turnip greens back to the 15th century BC where they were grown in regions throughout India.

Turnip greens are a unique plant because they are biennial, actually taking almost 2 years to fully grow and reproduce. The first year their roots develop and the second year their leaves and flowers form. Because they are able to last through winter months and keep the soil fertilized, they were an important crop used to maintain soil health throughout history.

In Nordic countries, historically turnips were a staple crop and turnip greens nutrition helped growing populations to thrive before being replaced by the potato in the 18th century. Rutabagas, which are a cross between turnips and cabbages, were first produced in Scandinavia around this time, where they are still commonly eaten today. Around the world turnip greens are sometimes referred to as “turnip leaves” or “turnip tops” (as they are called in the U.K.).

Today, turnips and turnip greens are enjoyed around the world for their health benefits in many types of cuisines. We'll likely see that the more researchers learn about turnip greens nutrition, the more widely available they come.

In Turkey, turnips are used to flavor şalgam, a juice made from turnips, purple carrots and spices; throughout the Middle East, turnips are pickled; in Japan, turnips and turnip greens are popular in stir fries; in Austria, raw shredded turnip-root is served in a chilled remoulade and turnip greens are used to make winter salads; and in the U.S., turnip greens are commonly cooked with ham or other pieces of meat and added to stews.

How to Buy Turnip Greens

In the U.S and Canada, turnip greens can usually be found at farmer's markets in the late fall and winter months when they've been freshly harvested. The turnip plant, which also produces the large, white turnip root vegetable, is commonly grown in temperate climates worldwide. In most cases, harvesters of the turnip plant grow the crop for its white, bulbous root, which is a popular vegetable around the world for both human and livestock consumption.

When buying turnip greens, look for leaves that are deeply colored and free from wilting. Avoiding limp and spotted leaves that have begun to spoil will ensure that the valuable antioxidants that turnip greens nutrition is known for are still present. You can usually find turnip greens attached to their large white roots at fresh markets; cut off the roots and try roasting them, keeping the greens aside for quick blanching, stir-frying, or for adding them to soups and stews.

How to Cook Turnip Greens

Both turnip greens and the white roots from the turnip plant have a pungent flavor similar to raw cabbage or radishes. Their taste is also described as being similar to that of mustard greens, both having a signature sharp, spicy flavor.

Baby turnip plants are also grown around the world, although in smaller quantities. These come in yellow, orange and red-fleshed varieties and have a milder flavor, as opposed to the stronger-tasting larger turnips. People usually prefer to eat baby turnip greens raw, such as in salads just like radishes are used.

Any bitter taste of turnip greens can be reduced by boiling them quickly and then pouring them into fresh, cold water to preserve their bright green color. Most people prefer the taste of turnip greens when they are cooked

and salted, since this helps to make them more mild and versatile in recipes. To quickly cook your greens and release some of the nutrients, bring a pot of water to a boil and add the cleaned greens for only 2-3 minutes, then drain and discard the water.

Turnip Greens Recipes

- To take advantage of turnip greens nutrition in recipes, try preparing and enjoying them the same way you would other leafy greens – like kale or spinach. Sauté turnip greens and add some garlic, lemon, olive oil, salt and pepper to bring out their taste.
 - You can replace kale with turnip greens in this [**Sautéed Kale**](#) Recipe.
 - Or use turnip greens in place of spinach in this [**Grecian Spinach**](#) **Recipe**.
 - If you purchase an entire turnip plant with the root attached, use the white turnip root to make healthy [**Turnip Fries**](#).
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Are There Any Concerns with Eating Turnip Greens?

Like other leafy greens, turnip greens nutrition contains a low level of oxalates, naturally occurring substances that are found in a variety of whole foods that can sometimes crystallize and cause health problems for

certain people. Oxalates don't pose a risk for most people, but can become problematic for anyone with existing kidney or gallbladder problems, such as kidney stones or gout, so you might want to speak to your doctor about specific restrictions if you have one of these known conditions.

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