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Bok Choy: A Top 3 Nutrient-Dense Vegetable that Battles Cancer

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Do you know what vegetable is in the top three on the Aggregate Nutrient Density Index, meaning it delivers one of the highest levels of nutrients per calorie compared to other foods? That would be bok choy –also called pak choi and white cabbage – which not only has just 12 calories per 100

grams, but also packs a potent nutrient punch.

In fact, as a part of a powerful group of vegetables called **cruciferous vegetables**, bok choy isn't just a great source of vitamins and minerals — it's also been shown to prevent cancer. (1) And that's not all. It's also one of the top **anti-inflammatory foods** on the planet, making it a vital piece of the healthy lifestyle puzzle.

Its mild, sweet flavor and crispy texture make it a great addition to any dish, as well as an alternative to other leafy greens. Think kale is too bitter? Can't eat collard greens without adding salt? Bok choy may be your new go-to superfood. Here's why.

9 Health Benefits of Boy Choy

1. Helps Treat and Prevent Cancer

Cruciferous vegetables are known for their glucosinolates, sulfur-containing chemicals that sometimes cause a bitter flavor. During the preparation, chewing and digestion of these vegetables, other compounds, such as indole, nitrile and sulforaphane, that have proven anticancer effects are created. (2, 3) These compounds are effective against cancer because they can do things like help protect cells from DNA damage and inactivate carcinogens. This is partly why bok choy and other cruciferous veggies are some of the top **cancer-fighting foods** around.

Bok choy also contains brassinin, an antimicrobial and often antioxidative substance that's a proven chemopreventive agent. (4) Many studies have shown that individuals who consume multiple servings of cruciferous vegetables per week are at a lower risk of cancers, specifically

prostate, colorectal, lung and breast cancer. (5)

2. Provides Antioxidant Power

Free radicals can wreak havoc on the body. **High-antioxidant foods** like bok choy do a great job at scavenging these disease-causing molecules. Just one cup of this leafy vegetable can provide substantially more than your daily recommended dietary allowance (RDA) of vitamin A and vitamin C, both of which are some of the most powerful antioxidant vitamins in the body.

Beyond these traditional antioxidants, there are a number of phytonutrients and phenolic acids in this nutrient-dense veggie that also activate a number of beneficial antioxidant activities (6, 7). Its significant levels of selenium also help boost its antioxidant powers.

3. Reduces Inflammation

Bok choy provides omega-3s and vitamin K, which help lower the risk of unwanted **inflammation**. Inflammation is at the root of many illnesses and can cause considerable damage if left untreated. Many of the polyphenols found in this form of Chinese cabbage also help reduce inflammation. (8)

4. Promotes Eye Health

Carrots are popularly known as the vegetable that helps keep eyes healthy, but thanks to substantial amounts of **vitamin A** and beta-carotene, bok choy is a serious contender. One cup provides the RDA of beta-carotene and over half of the RDA of vitamin A. The beta-carotene levels are high enough that the Macular Degeneration Association highly recommends it as a food that can help individuals suffering from **macular degeneration** – an eye disease that causes vision loss.

Aside from being an antioxidant that can help prevent infection, vitamin A is also very effective at preventing cataracts, improving of low-light vision, and treating of dry eyes and other eye-related diseases. (9)

5. Strengthens Bones

Bok choy has a stellar lineup of nutrients that help promote bone health. Iron, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium and **bone-building vitamin K** are abundant even in small servings. In addition, this superfood is a much healthier alternative to fat-filled milk for getting the RDA of calcium and preventing **calcium deficiency**.

The primary mineral found in bones and teeth is made with calcium and phosphorus. Vitamin K is proven to increase bone density in osteoporotic individuals, as well as reduce fracture rates. (10)
The combination of these minerals greatly contributes to the healthy growth and maintenance of healthy bones and muscles. (11)

6. Lowers Blood Pressure and Promotes Heart Health

As a calcium- and **potassium-rich food**, bok choy **naturally lowers blood pressure**. Potassium also helps process sodium, which reduces the damage sodium does to the cardiovascular system. (12)
Vitamin K also helps with proper blood clotting.

The vitamin B6 and folate in this nutrient superstar help prevent the accumulation of a compound called homocysteine. When too much is created in the body, it can lead to damage to blood vessels and heart problems.

7. Aids in Healthy Skin and Hair

One serving of bok choy provides almost three quarters of the daily recommended levels of vitamin C, which helps grow **collagen**, a protein needed to keep skin and hair healthy. As a **vitamin C food**, the healthy levels of collagen help smooth wrinkles and improve complexion. (13) The antibacterial qualities of bok choy also help combat skin infections like acne and eczema.

8. Boosts the Immune System

Vitamin C is at the forefront of why this powerful veggie is an **immune system booster**. It's a powerful antioxidant that helps bolster and maintain a healthy immune system. (14) **Selenium**, another mineral found in bok choy, also helps stimulate production of killer T-cells. Incorporating it into meals could be a way to fight off common illness throughout the year.

9. Assists in a Healthy Pregnancy

Bok choy, along with many other leafy greens, provides a great serving of folate. During pregnancy, the body's need for folate doubles due to the rapid growth and division of cells. Consuming enough **folate foods** and folic acid helps prevent birth defects like spina bifida and anencephaly and provides a number of other benefits to keep you and your baby healthy throughout your pregnancy. (15, 16)

Bok choy is a nutrient-dense vegetable that has roots in traditional Asian cooking, but it's been integrated into many different world cuisines. It's a part of a powerful group of vegetables known for their incredible health benefits through detoxification.

Bok choy is a great food to incorporate into your diet because of its low calories and many health benefits, such as cancer prevention, healthy digestion, and a hefty serving of many vitamins and minerals. We all look for healthy foods that are easy to add to dishes we already love, and this nutrient-dense veggie is a perfect choice, giving you all the health benefits without compromising flavor.

It provides an insanely high level of vitamin A and C per serving. A one-cup serving provides 140 percent of your RDA of vitamin A and over 75 percent of vitamin C. From antioxidants and an impressive number of **phytonutrients** to an abundance of minerals like iron, calcium, manganese and folate, bok choy can benefit almost every system in the body.

Incorporating it into your regular diet can help decrease inflammation, **fight free radical damage** and give your body some of the most powerful tools it needs to fight disease.

Bok choy falls under the zero calories or no-calorie food category because it only has 12 calories per 100-gram serving. It ranks very high on the Aggregate Nutrient Density Index, which goes beyond rating foods based on vitamin and mineral levels and measures phytochemical content and antioxidant capacity. It's among the top 3 vegetables on the index, which means it delivers one of the highest levels of nutrients per calorie as compared to other foods.

Depending on how bok choy is prepared and consumed, there are varying levels of vitamins and minerals available. Below are examples of the boiled or raw versions of this superfood:

100 grams of raw bok choy contains about: (17)

- 13 calories
- 2.2 grams carbohydrates
- 1.5 grams protein
- 0.2 gram fat
- 1 gram fiber
- 4,468 IU vitamin A (89 percent DV)
- 45 milligrams vitamin C (75 percent DV)
- 45.5 micrograms vitamin K (57 percent DV)
- 66 micrograms folate (16 percent DV)
- 105 milligrams calcium (11 percent DV)
- 0.2 milligram vitamin B6 (10 percent DV)
- 0.2 milligram manganese (8 percent DV)
- 252 milligrams potassium (7 percent DV)
- 19 milligram magnesium (5 percent DV)

100 grams of boiled bok choy contains about: (18)

- 12 calories
- 1.8 grams carbohydrates
- 1.6 grams protein
- 0.2 gram fat
- 1 gram fiber
- 4,249 IU vitamin A (85 percent DV)
- 26 milligrams vitamin C (43 percent DV)
- 34 micrograms vitamin K (42 percent DV)

- 371 milligrams potassium (11 percent DV)
- 41 micrograms folate (10 percent DV)
- 93 milligrams calcium (9 percent DV)
- 0.2 milligram vitamin B6 (8 percent DV)
- 0.1 milligram manganese (7 percent DV)
- 1 milligram iron (6 percent DV)

The major shift in nutrients between raw and cooked bok choy is the level of vitamin C and K depletion when the vegetable is cooked.

Interesting Facts About Bok Choy

Although bok choy is available year-round, it's better harvested and enjoyed in the winter months. When grown in warm temperatures, the plant wilts and its flavor is negatively affected. It takes about two months from planting to harvest this vegetable.

Bok choy and other Chinese cabbage have been enjoyed as part of Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese and other Asian cuisine for thousands of years. It was introduced to Europe in the 1800s and is now widely produced in Canada and the U.S.

The Chinese consider food their medicine, which is probably why nutrient-rich foods are staples in Asian cuisine. In addition to its other names, bok choy is sometimes called “soup spoon” because its stalk and leaves resemble a spoon.

How to Purchase and How to Cook Bok Choy

When choosing bok choy at the market, you should look for perky, dark green leaves with rigid, white stalks. Avoid blemished and wilting vegetables. And note, the selection of bok choy is better in the winter.

Bok choy comes in many varieties. The variations are usually related to the size and shape of the plant, but all bok choy has a similar upright, cylindrical stem with green or violet leaves. Baby bok choy is slightly milder and more sweet but can easily be overcooked. Adult bok choy has a stronger flavor and can hold up better during preparation.

At home, be sure to store bok choy in a cold environment to make sure it stays fresh and retains its vitamin C content. If transferring to another container, be sure to remove as much air from the bag as possible. If stored properly, bok choy will last up to a week but is best enjoyed when very fresh.

Immediately before preparing, make sure to separate the stalks and the leaves for a good washing. If you're cooking the bok choy, it's best to start with the stalks, as they take longer. You can add the leaves as the stalks begin to soften.

Preparing bok choy can be done in so many different ways. Here are a few ideas to make bok choy a healthy part of your daily meals:

- Raw in a bok choy salad
- Boiled in a soup
- Grated to make a curry
- Fried into a bok choy stir-fry
- Steamed into a vegetable dish
- Shredded into a coleslaw
- Pickled to make **kimchi**
- Sautéed with broth
- Cut and grilled with salt

If you have a green thumb, you can also grow bok choy at home. These plants grow best in spring or fall to avoid wilting from the summer heat. Bok choy would be a great addition to a backyard or window garden so it's easily accessible for cooking.

Bok Choy Recipes

Here are a few bok choy recipes to try:

- **Steamed Pumpkin with Bok Choy**
 - **Stir-Fried Bok Choy with Ginger and Garlic**
 - **Bok Choy Salad**
 - **Easy Roasted Salmon and Bok Choy**
 - **Healthy Bok Choy Soup**
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Potential Side Effects of Bok Choy

Bok choy is commonly referred to as “goitrogenic,” meaning it contains chemicals that can interfere with the production of thyroid hormones. For people with thyroid dysfunction, there has been talk about how cruciferous vegetables and other goitrogenic foods are to blame for inflammation, iodine metabolism issues and overall thyroid malfunction.

More up-to-date research has shown that very few circumstances allow for goitrogenic foods to have a negative effect on the thyroid, and the number of beneficial nutrients found in foods like bok choy outweigh concerns about the thyroid. If you suffer from thyroid issues, speak with your doctor before consuming bok choy, or you can integrate the vegetable into your diet slowly to ensure you don't have any negative side effects.

Final Thoughts

- Bok choy is among the top three foods on the Aggregate Nutrient Density Index, meaning it delivers one of the highest levels of nutrients per calorie compared to other foods. It also is considered a no-calorie food because it has just 12 calories per 100 grams.
- Some of the biggest benefits of this cruciferous, anti-inflammatory vegetable include helping treat and prevent cancer, providing a high amount of antioxidants, reducing inflammation, promoting eye health, strengthening bones, lowering blood pressure and promoting heart health, aiding in healthy skin and hair, boosting the immune system, and assisting in a healthy pregnancy.
- The major shift in nutrients between raw and cooked bok choy is the level of vitamin C and K depletion when the vegetable is cooked. It's best to consume it raw to get the most nutrients or at the very least only lightly cook it.

- Although bok choy is available year-round, it's better harvested and enjoyed in the winter months. When grown in warm temperatures, the plant wilts and its flavor is negatively affected. It takes about two months from planting to harvest this vegetable.

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