

Pumpkin: Health Benefits and Nutritional Breakdown

Written by [Megan Ware RDN LD](#) Reviewed by Natalie Butler, RD, LD

Last updated: Thu 13 October 2016

Many people tend to think of pumpkins as little more than just a Halloween decoration or a Thanksgiving pie filling, but maybe it is time to rethink this plump, nutritious orange plant.

Pumpkin is an extremely nutrient-dense food, meaning it is chock-full of vitamins and minerals but low in calories.

There are many creative ways pumpkin can be incorporated into meals, including desserts, soups, salads, preserves, and even as a substitute for butter. Next time pumpkin season comes around, don't carve it, cook it up and eat it.

This *MNT* Knowledge Center feature is part of a [collection of articles](#) on the health benefits of popular foods.

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Fast facts on pumpkin

Here are some key points about pumpkin. More detail and supporting information is in the main article.

- The [potassium](#) contained within pumpkins can have a positive effect on [blood pressure](#)
- The [antioxidants](#) and [vitamins](#) contained within pumpkins could prevent degenerative damage to the eyes
- Canned pumpkin pie mix 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 of consuming pumpkin

Consuming fruits and vegetables of all kinds has long been associated with a reduced risk of many lifestyle-related health conditions. Many studies have suggested that increasing consumption of plant foods like pumpkin decreases the risk of obesity and overall mortality. It can also help stave off diabetes, heart disease, and promote a healthy complexion and hair, increased energy, and overall lower weight.

Pumpkin is one of the best-known sources of [beta-carotene](#), a powerful antioxidant that gives orange vegetables and fruits their vibrant color. Beta-carotene is converted to vitamin A in the body once it is eaten.

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.

Blood pressure



There are many creative ways pumpkin can be incorporated into your diet, including desserts, soups, salads, and preserves.

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

Consuming adequate potassium is almost as important as decreasing sodium intake for the treatment of hypertension (high-blood pressure). Other foods that are high in potassium include cantaloupe, avocado, pineapple, tomatoes, oranges, spinach, and bananas.

Increased potassium intake is also [associated with](#) a reduced risk of stroke, protection against loss of muscle mass, preservation of bone mineral density, and reduction in the formation of kidney stones.

Cancer

Research has demonstrated a positive relationship between a diet rich in beta-carotene and a reduction in the occurrence of prostate cancer; this is [according to a study](#) conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health's Department of Nutrition.

Beta-carotene has also been shown to have an [inverse association](#) with the development of colon cancer in 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."

Eye Health

The antioxidants vitamin C, vitamin E, and beta-carotene (all of which are found in pumpkin) have been shown to support eye health and prevent degenerative damage.

A higher intake of all fruits (3 or more servings per day) has been shown to decrease the risk of and progression of [age-related macular degeneration](#).

A study, involving more than 100,000 participants, investigated the effect of antioxidant vitamins and beta-carotene on age-related maculopathy (ARM) - damage to the part of the eye that provides our central vision.

They concluded that "These data suggest a protective role for fruit intake on the risk of neovascular ARM."

Fertility

For women of child-bearing age, consuming more iron from plant sources such as spinach, beans, pumpkin, tomatoes, and beets appear to [promote fertility](#), according to Harvard Medical School's Harvard Health Publications.

The vitamin A in pumpkin (consumed as beta-carotene then converted to vitamin A in the body) is also [essential during pregnancy](#) and lactation for hormone synthesis.

Immunity

Plant foods like pumpkins that are high in both vitamin C and beta-carotene offer an immunity boost from their powerful combination of nutrients.

Nutritional breakdown of pumpkin



Pumpkin is an extremely nutrient-dense food, meaning it is high in vitamins and minerals but low in calories.

According to the [USDA National Nutrient Database](#), one cup of pumpkin, cooked, boiled, drained, and without salt, contains:

- 49 [calories](#)
- 1.76 grams of protein
- 0.17 grams of fat
- 0 grams of [cholesterol](#)
- 12 grams of carbohydrate (including 2.7 grams of fiber and 5.1 grams of sugar)

Consuming one cup of cooked, canned pumpkin would provide well over 100 percent of our daily needs for vitamin A, 20 percent of the daily value for vitamin C, 10 percent or more for vitamin E, riboflavin, potassium, [copper](#), and manganese, and at least 5 percent for thiamin, B-6, [folate](#), pantothenic acid, niacin, iron, [magnesium](#), and phosphorus.

Of course, using fresh pumpkin and preparing it at home will deliver the most health benefits, but canned pumpkin is also a great choice. Be sure to steer clear of canned pumpkin pie mix, which is usually right next to the canned pumpkin in grocery stores and in a similar can but has added sugars and syrups.

Canned pumpkin should have only one ingredient: pumpkin.

How to incorporate more pumpkin into your diet

Although the jack-o-lantern variety of pumpkins is perfectly edible, it is best to look for the [sweet or pie pumpkin](#) varieties for cooking, these are smaller and sweeter.

Make sure the pumpkin has a few inches of stem left and that it 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 into 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
- Make a quick treat of pumpkin chocolate yogurt by combining Greek yogurt, pumpkin puree or canned pumpkin, honey, [cinnamon](#), and cocoa powder.

Try some of these good-for-you recipes that incorporate pumpkin:

[Banana pumpkin power smoothie](#)

[Low-fat pumpkin bread with cinnamon cream cheese](#)

[A healthier pumpkin pie](#)

[Green pumpkin pie smoothie](#)

[Blueberry pumpkin oat muffins](#)

[Savory Italian sausage and pumpkin penne.](#)

Written by [Megan Ware RDN LD](#)

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Article last updated on Thu 13 October 2016.

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