

THE TRUTH ABOUT PUMPKIN

IS PUMPKIN GOOD FOR YOUR BODY?



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INTRODUCTION

There's no denying we love pumpkins. It seems like as soon as Labor Day is over, pumpkin products are everywhere. Pumpkin spice lattes, pumpkin granola, and pumpkin pie crowd grocery store shelves. In the beauty aisles of pharmacies, pumpkin finds its way into shower gel and body butter.

Since pumpkins are popular, it makes sense to ask an important question: are pumpkins good for your body?

THE HISTORY OF PUMPKINS

Pumpkins are delicious, versatile, and they have great cultural significance as well. They're used as decorations and in a wide array of products, but where do they come from?

The best guess of food historians is that pumpkins originated in Central America more than 7,000 years ago. The earliest known pumpkins did not look very much like the pumpkins we eat today. Their flesh was bitter and quite different from the sweet, orange pumpkin flesh that makes its way into pumpkin pies at Thanksgiving.

Those early pumpkins were cultivated because their thick rinds made them sturdy enough to store during the cold winter months.

One of the earliest written mentions of pumpkins came from a French explorer named Jacques Cartier. While exploring the area near the St. Lawrence River in 1584, he reported finding something he called "gros melons." The original English translation was *pompion*, which later evolved into our modern word, pumpkin.

Pumpkins are part of the melon family, which means that they're related to watermelon, cantaloupe, cucumbers, honeydew melons, and zucchini. They take between 90 and 120 days to grow from seeds. Unlike some other crops, their seeds can be saved and used to plant next year's crop.

The largest pumpkin ever recorded weighed 1,810 pounds and eight ounces. It was grown in Stillwater, Minnesota in 2010.

The Halloween tradition of carving pumpkins dates back to an Irish legend about a man named Stingy Jack, who repeatedly tricked the devil. When he died, he was cursed to wander the night using only a burning coal to light his way. He put the coal into a carved-out turnip, which later turned into a pumpkin – perhaps because pumpkins are much easier than turnips to carve!

While pumpkins are native to Central American and Mexico, they are now grown on every continent but Antarctica. In the United States, pumpkin products are strongly associated with Halloween and Thanksgiving and are not as widely available at other times of year.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS BOOK

The goal of this eBook is to explain the nutritional value and health benefits of pumpkin. Since most of us eat it, it can be useful to understand what the pumpkin offers us, so that we can make an informed decision about including it in our diet.

We'll start with a review of the primary health benefits of pumpkin, including the pumpkin's nutritional content and the impact it has on the human body. After that, we'll talk about whether adding pumpkin to your diet can help you stay healthy.

While most vegetables, pumpkin included, are healthy to eat, it's important to take a look at the pros and cons of pumpkin. That includes some of the pitfalls that can arise from the pumpkin craze that sweeps the United States every fall.

Finally, I'll explain some of the other, non-dietary uses of pumpkin. These include skin care, hair care, and even pet care!

By the time you've finished reading, you'll understand why and how to add pumpkin to your diet – and how it can help you lead the healthy life you deserve.

Let's get started!

HEALTH BENEFITS OF PUMPKIN

Pumpkins are popular, but they're also packed with vitamins and nutrients. In this chapter, we'll review the health benefits of pumpkin. Some you may already know, but some are likely to surprise you.

NUTRITIONAL BREAKDOWN OF PUMPKIN

Let's start with the nutritional breakdown of pumpkin. The USDA says that one cup of cooked pumpkin contains 49 calories, 1.76 grams of protein, 0.17 grams of fat, 12.01 grams of carbohydrate, and no cholesterol. It also contains 2.7 grams of fiber.

Pumpkin is also a source of many essential vitamins and minerals. For example, a cup of pumpkin contains:

- 200% of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of Vitamin A
- 19% of the RDA of Vitamin C
- 10% (or more) of the RDA of copper, manganese, potassium, riboflavin, and Vitamin E
- 5% of the RDA of folate, iron, magnesium, niacin, pantothenic acid, phosphorus, and Vitamin B6

The Vitamin A content is one of pumpkin's biggest health benefits. Many orange fruits and vegetables, including carrots, sweet potatoes, and mangoes, are also rich sources of Vitamin A.

You should also be aware that pumpkin seeds have nutritional value. They're a good source of phosphorus, manganese, magnesium, iron, zinc, copper, and Vitamin K. They contain healthy fat, too.

IMPROVED IMMUNITY

There's evidence that the carotenoids in pumpkin can boost the effectiveness of the human immune system, making it easier for us to fight off diseases and infections.

A 1989 study found that beta carotene enhanced the proliferation of T and B lymphocytes (white blood cells) in subjects. It also improved the performance of T cells, making them more effective at combating infections and diseases, up to and including cancer.

ANTIOXIDANTS/ANTI-INFLAMMATORY

Vitamin A and Vitamin C are both powerful antioxidants. Antioxidants protect the body against something called oxidative stress, which damages the cells and can set off a chain reaction of inflammation in your body.

A 2012 study examined the effects of intravenous Vitamin C on patients who had cancer. It concluded that the antioxidants in the Vitamin C reduced the number of inflammatory markers in the patients tested and that Vitamin C supplementation could be beneficial for cancer patients.

VISION

The connection between Vitamin A and vision is well-established. You might have been told from an early age to eat your carrots – a great source of Vitamin A – to improve your eyesight. There is plenty of scientific evidence to support the idea that Vitamin A is beneficial to the eyes.

A 1990 study found that the human body uses Vitamin A to produce something called cis-retinol, which is essential to the proper function of the rods and cones in your eyes. Eating pumpkin, which has plenty of Vitamin A and carotenoids gives your body what it needs to maintain proper function in your eyes.

WEIGHT LOSS

Many of us struggle with extra weight, especially as we get older. Our metabolism slows down, and we may require fewer calories than we did when we were younger. You might be wondering whether adding pumpkin to your diet can help you lose weight.

One big weight loss benefit of pumpkin is its fiber content. Fiber adds bulk to food. It also takes longer to digest foods that are high in fiber than it does to digest foods that are not. That means that eating pumpkin, which is a great source of fiber, can help you stay satisfied between meals.

CARDIAC HEALTH

Heart disease is still the most common cause of death in the United States for both men and women. It's essential to eat a healthy diet with foods that support and protect the function of your heart, minimizing the risks that you'll experience a heart attack or stroke.

Pumpkin, as we mentioned before, is a good source of potassium and magnesium. Both minerals play an important role in cardiac health. A 2006 study confirmed that potassium is necessary to regulate the heart beat and keep it pumping at a healthy rate.. It can also, as we'll talk about later in this chapter, lower your blood pressure.

REDUCED CANCER RISK

For many people, finding ways to reduce their risk of getting cancer is a priority. Cancer can attack any part of the body and is often fatal. The treatments cause an array of painful and unpleasant side effects. Can adding pumpkin to your diet help?

A 2001 study found that people who ate large amounts of fruits and vegetables, particularly those high in fiber, had a lower risk of getting colorectal cancer than people who did not eat many fruits and vegetables. It also noted that cereal fiber was not as beneficial as the fiber from produce.

Colorectal cancer isn't the only cancer risk that can be reduced by eating pumpkin. A study from 1993 found that women who ate fiber-rich diets had a 30% lower risk of getting breast cancer. Inflammation and the body's immune response are also essential for reducing the risk of cancer, and we've already talked about how pumpkin can help boost immunity and fight inflammation.

REDUCED BLOOD PRESSURE

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is a risk factor in heart disease. It's commonly present in patients who have diabetes, as well. Eating foods that are rich in potassium and magnesium can help to regulate your blood pressure and reduce your risk of heart disease.

A 2004 study confirmed that potassium plays a role in relaxing the smooth muscles around the blood vessels – something that's essential to keep blood flowing regularly through your body. Likewise, a study from 2005 found that magnesium prevents the build-up of calcium in the blood vessels, something that can contribute to coronary disease and high blood pressure.

SKIN HEALTH

The skin is the largest organ in the human body, but its needs are sometimes overlooked, especially from a nutritional standpoint. However, there's evidence to suggest that adding pumpkin to your diet can help keep your skin healthy and flexible.

A 2011 study found that the carotenoids found in pumpkins can even protect your skin against damage caused by the ultraviolet rays of the sun. Eating foods that are rich in carotenoids can make your sunscreen more effective.

As you can see, there are some significant health benefits to eating pumpkin. Coming up next, we'll talk about whether adding pumpkin to your diet can really keep you healthy.

CAN PUMPKIN HELP YOU STAY HEALTHY?

How much of the food you eat is in its original form? Many people living in the United States consume heavily processed food. Food that bears little resemblance to its natural state is often stripped of its nutritional value.

It's important to keep in mind that food processing may be minimal or extensive. A can of pumpkin puree is processed, but provided that the only ingredient is pumpkin, it will still have great nutritional value. The same cannot be said of pumpkin pie filling, which has sugar added.

In this chapter, we'll talk about whether adding pumpkin to your diet can help you stay healthy, and also make some suggestions about how to add it.

FIBER AND HEALTH

One of the best things about adding pumpkin to your diet is that it's a rich source of dietary fiber. Fiber, as you may now, acts as a "broom" for your digestive system. It can't be digested. When you eat it, it keeps your bowel movements regular. It can also contribute to a feeling of satiety when you eat, making it less likely that you'll eat between meals.

Fiber isn't just good for your digestive system. It can also reduce your risk of developing diabetes. A study from 2009 looked at 3,428 men between the ages of 60 and 79 to evaluate their risk of diabetes. The researchers found that the men who had the lowest intake of dietary fiber were also the most likely to end up with diabetes. Conversely, the men with the highest fiber intake had the lowest risk of diabetes.

PUMPKIN AND URINARY HEALTH

There's also plenty of evidence to suggest that eating pumpkin regularly can improve prostate health in men and urinary health in both men and women.

Overactive bladder is a condition that can affect women and men as they age. A 2014 study found that consuming pumpkin seed oil helped to relieve the symptoms of overactive bladder disease and regulate bladder function in the people who took it.

DIABETES RISK

We already talked about how eating pumpkin can reduce the risk of diabetes due to its high fiber content. However, it can also reduce the risk of diabetes in another way – by regulating your blood sugar.

A 2007 meta-analysis of studies of the effects of magnesium intake on diabetes found that magnesium intake was directly correlated to the risk of type 2 diabetes. People with adequate magnesium intake were better able to respond to insulin and regulate blood sugar than people whose intake of magnesium was too low.

PUMPKINS AND MALE FERTILITY

Infertility can affect both men and women and can be extremely painful for couples who want to have children. It may surprise you to learn that adding pumpkin seeds to your diet can help.

Zinc plays an important role in maintaining sperm quality and health. Pumpkin seeds are a good source of zinc. A study from 2008 found that men who did not get enough zinc in their diets were more likely to experience infertility than men who did.

The primary takeaway here is that many of the nutrients and qualities of both pumpkins and pumpkin seeds can help you stay healthy. Pumpkin by itself is, of course, not enough to keep you healthy. But, when it's part of a healthy diet that includes plenty of other fruits and vegetables, minimal processed foods, and exercise, it can play an essential role in keeping your heart, immune system, digestive system, and other parts of your body functioning properly.

Of course, there are some things you should be aware of when it comes to adding pumpkin to your diet. In the next chapter, we'll talk about the pros and cons of adding pumpkin to your diet.

PROS AND CONS OF PUMPKIN

When pumpkin season arrives, you may find that you're eager to try every pumpkin product that you see at your grocery store or pharmacy. It's important to keep in mind that not all pumpkin products are healthy.

In this chapter, we'll talk about the pros (which will echo much of what we've already talked about) and cons of eating pumpkin, including some common-sense advice to help you identify healthy and unhealthy pumpkin products.

THE PROS OF PUMPKINS

Let's start with the good news. There are lots of excellent reasons to add pumpkin to your diet. We've already talked about some of them, but we'll add a few others here to help you understand why pumpkin is good for you.

NUTRITIONAL CONTENT

We've already discussed the nutritional content of pumpkin, but as a reminder, your body needs nutrients like Vitamin A, Vitamin C, potassium, magnesium, manganese, and zinc to be healthy. Pumpkin is a very good source of all of these micronutrients.

As a rule of thumb, it's a good idea to "eat the rainbow" if you want to make sure that your body gets the nutrients it needs. Pumpkin, like many fruits and vegetables that have a bright orange color, is high in carotenoids. According to the National Institutes of Health, carotenoids protect the eyes, reduce inflammation, and mitigate the risk of cancer, including lung cancer.

FIBER/SATIETY

Pumpkin flesh is satisfying to eat because it tastes good and is an excellent source of fiber. Including fiber-rich foods like pumpkin in your diet can fill your stomach. And, because fiber takes longer to move through your digestive system than other components of food, it can keep you feeling full and satisfied even hours after you've eaten a meal.

The benefit here is clear. When you eat pumpkin, your body is less likely to crave food between meals because your stomach will still feel full. That's important for people who are trying to lose weight.

DIGESTION

Adults should eat between 25 and 38 grams of fiber per day to maintain healthy digestion and bowel movements. However, most of us get significantly less fiber than we need.

Adding pumpkin to your diet is an easy and tasty way to increase your fiber intake. Both pumpkin flesh and pumpkin seeds are a good source of fiber. Pumpkin is even safe for babies and can be used to relieve constipation in people of all ages.

VERSATILITY

One of the best things about pumpkin is its versatility. You might have a hard time adding some foods to your diet because they're not easy to adapt to different recipes but that's not the case with pumpkin.

You might think of pumpkin as a sweet ingredient, but it can also be savory. Pumpkin can be added to vegetable soup or pasta sauce. It can serve as a substitute for similar ingredients like butternut squash or sweet potato. You can put it into stir fry or even use it as part of your breakfast burrito.

Of course, pumpkin's sweet uses are well-documented. It can be used in pumpkin pie, pumpkin cheesecake, and even pumpkin ice cream.

Pumpkin's versatility allows it to be used in a wide variety of ways. Even a quick search online reveals thousands of delicious pumpkin recipes to try.

THE CONS OF PUMPKIN

The health benefits of pumpkin are undeniable, but that doesn't mean that we can avoid talking about some precautionary issues that you should be aware of. There are no real risks to eating pumpkin but there are some things to think about when you're adding pumpkin to your diet.

SEASONALITY

The first thing to be aware of is that, in most parts of the world, pumpkin is a seasonal product. Fresh pumpkins are generally available in the United States starting in late September or early October. They keep for a long time even when they're raw, but you're unlikely to find fresh pumpkin in most stores after December.

Canned pumpkin may be available year-round, but a lot of supermarkets only carry it in the fall and early winter. Of course, you can mitigate pumpkin's seasonality by stocking up on canned pumpkin when it's available. That way, you can be sure that you'll have it any time you want it.

PUMPKIN AND SUGAR

One of the biggest risks when shopping for pumpkin products is ignoring the sugar content in them. Many popular pumpkin goodies such as pumpkin pie contain a ton of sugar. It's important to make sure that you read the labels before buying any pumpkin product.

When you shop for canned pumpkin, the only ingredients should be pumpkin puree. Avoid pumpkin pie filling which is usually heavily sweetened. The sugar can offset any nutritional and health benefits associated with eating pumpkins.

FAKE PUMPKIN PRODUCTS

Fall is pumpkin spice season in the United States but be aware that pumpkin spice is not the same as pumpkin. In fact, many pumpkin spice products contain no pumpkin at all.

The Starbucks pumpkin spice latte is a case in point. Originally, it contained no pumpkin. Now, there is a small percentage of pumpkin puree in the "pumpkin spice sauce" that gives the beverage its flavor. However, the pumpkin is responsible for less than 2% of the beverage's content and the first ingredient in the sauce is sugar.

Before you buy any pumpkin spice or pumpkin product, read the label carefully to make sure that consuming it will provide the health benefits of pumpkin. If it doesn't, then keep looking until you find a healthier product.

LACK OF PROTEIN

Pumpkin is a good source of carbohydrates and fiber, but it can't provide every nutrient you need. Pumpkin flesh is not a good source of protein and for that reason, is not an ideal substitute for the protein in a dish.

The good news is that you can mitigate pumpkin's lack of protein by combining it with some protein-rich foods. Options include fish or skinless chicken breast for non-vegetarians and beans or tofu for vegetarians.

None of the cons I've listed here take away from pumpkin's nutritional value and health benefits. The main thing you need to do is to avoid products that contain little or no pumpkin as well as those that are high in added sugar and other unhealthy ingredients.

In the next and final chapter, we'll talk about some of the non-dietary uses for pumpkin.

OTHER USES FOR PUMPKIN

Pumpkin is a healthy addition to your diet, but it has other uses as well. In this chapter, we'll talk about how to use pumpkin for skin care, hair care, and even pet care!

PUMPKIN FOR SKIN CARE

If you peruse the shelves of your local pharmacy or beauty supply store, you're likely to notice that pumpkin is an ingredient in many skin care products. People who prefer homemade treatments may also find that pumpkin can be beneficial to their skin.

According to the International Dermal Institute, pumpkin is good for your skin because:

- It contains alpha hydroxy acids which stimulate skin cell repair and can brighten the appearance of skin.
- It contains Vitamins A and C to stimulate collagen production and soften your skin, giving it a more youthful appearance.
- Pumpkin seeds are a rich source of zinc, which can control hormones and oil production, both of which can contribute to acne.
- Pumpkin seed oil is high in Vitamin E and can be used as a moisturizer directly on the skin.

You can make a simple homemade pumpkin mask by combining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of pumpkin puree, one egg, and one of the following:

- Two teaspoons of raw, organic honey for dry to normal skin
- One tablespoon of organic apple cider vinegar for oily skin

Simply mix all the ingredients together, apply the mask to your face, and let it sit for 15 minutes or so. Then, rinse your face with warm water and apply your usual moisturizer.

PUMPKIN FOR HAIR CARE

Collagen is one of the building blocks of your hair, too, so it stands to reason that pumpkin can be used in hair products and treatments. Pumpkin seed oil is something that can be used to stimulate hair growth as well as to treat dry and damaged hair.

A study from 2014 showed that men who took a supplement of pumpkin seed oil experienced 30% more hair growth than men who took a placebo. If you want to reap the hair care benefits of pumpkin seeds, you can take a supplement or simply take a spoonful of pumpkin seed oil every day.

To use pumpkin seed oil topically, heat a small amount (adjust according to the length of your hair) in a double boiler and massage it into your scalp when it's warmed through. Wrap your head in a warm towel and let it sit for 10 minutes. Then, shampoo and condition your hair as usual.

PUMPKIN FOR PETS

Pumpkin is healthy for people to eat but it may surprise you to learn that it's good for pets, too. At any time of year, you can peruse the shelves of your grocery or pet supply store, for example, and find dog treats that contain pumpkin. Dogs love the flavor of pumpkin and some cats do, too.

Here are some of the key health benefit of pumpkin for your pets:

1. Pumpkin's high fiber content can help regulate your pet's bowel movements. Interestingly, it can be beneficial for both constipation and diarrhea. The fiber adds bulk to the animal's stool which can help with diarrhea, and fiber also can prevent constipation.
2. The water content in pumpkin can help your pets stay hydrated, particularly if their primary diet consists of dry kibble. Some animals don't drink enough water – just like people! – and adding some moist canned pumpkin to their diet can help in that regard.
3. Just like people, sometimes pets gain weight and need to lose a few pounds. Adding a bit of pumpkin to your pet's kibble or regular food can help them feel more satisfied after eating thanks to pumpkin's high fiber content.
4. Dogs and cats can both have issues with urinary health. Just as pumpkin can help prevent urinary problems in people, it can do the same thing for dogs.
5. Finally, the nutritional content of pumpkins, including carotenoids, potassium, and Vitamin C, will provide your pet with necessary nutrients to support their immune systems, vision, and other key bodily functions.

In other words, stirring a little pumpkin puree into your dog's or cat's food will do them a lot of good, ensuring that their digestive systems stay healthy and keeping them hydrated and satisfied.

As you can see, it makes a lot of sense to keep a supply of canned pumpkin in your pantry. You can use it in a variety of ways and, as long as you control the sugar content, you'll reap all the health benefits of pumpkin.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for reading *The Truth About Pumpkin!* I hope that you have enjoyed the content and that it has inspired you to find more ways to add pumpkin to your diet.

Eating pumpkin regularly can help you feel more satisfied between meals. That's a big factor in weight loss which is why it makes sense to eat pumpkin if you're trying to lose a few pounds.

As a reminder, the nutrients in pumpkin can also:

- Regulate your digestion and bowel movements
- Prevent diabetes by regulating blood sugar
- Protect your blood vessels and heart and reduce your risk of heart disease
- Provide men with the zinc they need for good reproductive health and fertility
- Lower your blood pressure
- Reduce inflammation throughout your body
- Reduce your risk of cancer, especially colorectal cancer, breast cancer, and lung cancer
- Protect your bladder and prevent overactive bladder
- Nourish your skin and hair and prevent acne
- Keep your pets healthy

The most important thing to remember when shopping for pumpkin products is that buying and eating a product that's high in sugar or saturated fat will counteract the health benefits of eating pumpkin. Make sure to read the label of any food before you buy it.

Be wary of any product that is pumpkin spice flavored. It might be delicious, but it's also likely to be high in sugar and not contain any pumpkin.

Thank you again for reading!

RESOURCES

<http://www.pbs.org/food/the-history-kitchen/history-pumpkins-recipes/>
<https://www.history.com/topics/halloween/pumpkin-facts>
<http://www.hsgpurchasing.com/Articles/pumpkin.htm>
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