

Pumpkin: The Fall Superfood

Pumpkin is not just for jack-o-lanterns and pumpkin pie, pumpkin is a superfood. Pumpkin, like other winter squashes, is very nutrient-dense. It shouldn't be reserved for just the fall season, take advantage of its fiber, vitamin A, and antioxidants year-round.

Buy it Year-Round

Although found fresh in the grocery store in early fall, pumpkin is available in stores year-round. Pumpkin can be found in cans as pumpkin puree, which offers just as many nutritional benefits as fresh pumpkin does. However, like any canned food, it is important to pay attention to the nutrition panel and look for added sugar and added salt. Try to purchase 100% pumpkin puree to avoid any added sugar.

Nutritional Content & Health Benefits

Pumpkin is a complex carbohydrate rich in nutrients. It is low in calories and high in fiber, which keeps one feeling full for longer and supports gut health. The fiber in pumpkin can also help prevent blood sugar levels from spiking, which is especially important in diabetes management. Pumpkin also contains vitamins and minerals including vitamin A, vitamin C, and potassium. Surprisingly, one cup of pumpkin packs over 10% of your daily value for potassium. Their bright orange color comes from the beta-carotene in their peel. Beta-carotene is converted to vitamin A which is important for eye health. One of the most important benefits of vitamin A is that it reduces the risk of macular degeneration. Just one half-cup serving of pumpkin provides 100% of the daily value of beta-carotene.

Add Pumpkin to Your Diet

Pumpkin can be included in many different meals and snacks throughout all seasons of the year. Some foods with pumpkin can be high in added sugar and salt, so it is important to remember to consume these foods in healthy amounts.

Add pumpkin into your favorite roasted vegetable dish.

Bake a pumpkin pie.

Incorporate pumpkin puree or chopped pumpkin into your cozy fall soups and chilis.

Make pumpkin spice pancakes for breakfast.

Save the pumpkin seeds from your carved pumpkin and roast them. (Make it sweet with brown sugar or add some savory spices, like garlic powder and pepper.)

Bake chocolate-chip pumpkin bread or muffins.

Blend some pumpkin into your morning smoothie.

It should also be noted that pumpkin is high in potassium. Some individuals with health conditions like kidney disease, may need to monitor their potassium intake. Look out for pumpkin next time you go grocery shopping to add extra flavor and nutrition to your diet.

Sources: Taylor Bonn & Carol Connell with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. Some nutrient information was also pulled from North Carolina Cooperative Extension System and Clemson (South Carolina) Cooperative Extension System.

Questions about how to incorporate more pumpkin into your diet or how to preserve pumpkin can be directed to Kaitlin Moore, Nutrition, Food Safety & Health Agent at 785-243-8185 or kaitlinmoore@ksu.edu.