

# Nutrition News

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## Benefits of Fall Foods

The holidays are quickly approaching, and it's time to pick up seasonal ingredients at your local farmers market or grocery store to use in your holiday meals.

During the fall, there are a lot of low-calorie foods readily available in the produce section that are high in fiber and antioxidants and are good sources of vitamins A and C and potassium.

When people think of Thanksgiving, they think family, overeating, watching football and sleeping. This year you can keep your energy levels up by covering 75 percent of your dinner plate with different colored vegetables and keeping higher fat sides and desserts to a minimum.



### **Here are some fall foods that are in season and packed with nutrients:**

- **Sweet potatoes:** Commonly confused with yams, sweet potatoes are nutritionally superior. A plain baked sweet potato contains only 100 calories and has 4 grams of fiber. Like many orange vegetables, sweet potatoes contain high amounts of vitamin A, which helps repair tissues in your body. Adequate vitamin A also helps maintain healthy eyes and improves your night vision.
  - *Food tip:* Don't overload sweet potatoes with butter and brown sugar in a casserole dish. Instead, roast them and eat the skin for more nutritional benefits. Top with 1-2 tablespoons of light margarine and fresh ground cinnamon.
- **Brussels sprouts:** They belong to the cruciferous vegetable family, which contains compounds that have been linked to lower cancer risks. They are an excellent source of vitamin K, which is crucial in helping blood clot in the body and has been shown to help maintain strong bones in the elderly (1).
  - *Food tip:* Try to purchase Brussels sprouts still on the vine, which are fresher and store longer. Good quality sprouts are firm, compact and vivid green (2).
- **Pumpkins:** The nutrient packed jack-o-lantern is not only fun to decorate but is loaded with essential nutrients. The beta carotene in pumpkins may reverse skin damage caused by the sun and may have anti-inflammatory properties. Pumpkin seeds also are excellent sources of omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids (3).
  - *Food tip:* If making a pumpkin pie, choose "100 percent pure pumpkin" not "pumpkin pie mix," which contains added sugars.
- **Winter Squash:** All varieties (acorn, butternut, delicate and spaghetti) contain potassium, niacin, iron and beta carotene. They also are loaded with soluble fiber, which plays an important role in reducing the incidence of colon cancer.
  - *Food tip:* Smaller winter squash are best baked. Cut in half, brush with light margarine, sprinkle with brown sugar and bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes (4).

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- **Cinnamon:** Available throughout the year, cinnamon is a key spice in many Thanksgiving dishes. This potent spice actually is brown bark from a tree. Research suggests it can help lower blood sugar and cholesterol in people with Type 2 diabetes (5).
  - *Food tip:* Both ground and stick forms are equally healthy. Sticks will last a year when stored properly, while ground cinnamon will last about six months. Sprinkle on baked sweet potatoes or roasted carrots.
- **Pomegranate:** This super fruit is packed with free-radical-fighting antioxidants. The type of antioxidant is called polyphenols, which can prevent the conversion of cholesterol into plaque, thus preventing heart problems in the future. Pomegranates have more antioxidants than red wine, blueberry juice and green tea (6).
  - *Food tip:* To remove the seeds from the fruit, lightly score the rind in several spots and immerse the fruit in a bowl of water. Hold fruit under water and break apart the skin and membranes. Skim seeds, and discard membrane.
- **Cranberries:** This Thanksgiving avoid the sugar-laden canned stuff and prepare your own cranberry sauce. Cranberries contain a type of phytochemical called flavanoids. The cranberry has three different types of flavanoids (anthocyanins, flavonols and proanthocyanidins), which may decrease the risk of heart disease and cancer (7).
  - *Food tip:* Look for fresh cranberries in the cold area of the produce section. Cook cranberries only until they pop. Overcooking can cause them to be bitter.
- **Nuts:** Almonds, hazelnuts, peanuts, pecans, walnuts, pistachios and pine nuts all are healthful for your heart and are good plant sources for protein (8). Research suggests nuts can help lower “bad” cholesterol levels and raise “good” cholesterol levels (9). All varieties are very calorie-dense, so watch your portions particularly when eating desserts like pecan pie that are high in calories before the nuts are added.
  - *Food tip:* An ounce of nuts contains roughly 170 calories. Toast pine nuts or almonds in 350 degree oven for 5 to 10 minutes and sprinkle them on a mixed green salad.

### Resources:

1. <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002407.htm>
2. <http://www.whfoods.com/genpage.php?tname=foodspice&dbid=10>
3. <http://www.suite101.com/content/health-benefits-of-pumpkin-a153140>
4. <http://whfoods.org/genpage.php?tname=foodspice&dbid=63>
5. <http://www.womenshealthmag.com/nutrition/the-benefits-of-cinnamon>
6. <http://healthpsych.psy.vanderbilt.edu/PomegranateJuice.htm>
7. <http://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/features/crazy-for-cranberries>
8. <http://www.healthcastle.com/nuts-benefits.shtml>
9. <http://www.webmd.com/diet/features/go-nuts-your-diet>

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