

THE AMAZING PUMPKIN SEED

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(2009)

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IMPORTANT

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Introduction

Pumpkin seeds are flat, dark green seeds, with some encased in a yellow-white husk. They have a malleable, chewy texture, and have a subtly sweet, pleasantly nutty flavour. Pumpkin seeds should be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator. While pumpkin seeds stay edible for several months, they seem to lose their "peak freshness" after four to eight weeks.

Pumpkin seeds are a very good source of the minerals phosphorus, magnesium and manganese. They are also a good source of other minerals including zinc, iron and copper. In addition, pumpkin seeds are a good source of protein and vitamin K.

In recent years, pumpkin seeds have become more popular as studies suggest they have unique nutritional and health benefits.

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Health Benefits of Pumpkin Seeds

The health benefits of pumpkin seeds include:

- **Effective Source of Magnesium** - 125 grams of pumpkin seeds contains 92% of the daily adult requirement of magnesium - a mineral in which most western individuals are lacking.

- **Prostate Protection** - Pumpkin Seeds promote overall prostate health; and they help to alleviate the often difficult urination associated with an enlarged prostate.
- **Improved Bladder Function** - In studies, pumpkin seed extracts have been noted to improve bladder function in animals.
- **Lower Cholesterol** - Pumpkin seeds contain phytosterols, which are compounds that have been noted to reduce levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol.
- **Cancer Prevention** - It has also been noted that the same phytosterols that lower cholesterol also protect against many cancers.
- **Depression Treatment** - Pumpkin seeds contain L-tryptophan, which is a compound naturally effective against depression. Consequently, pumpkin seeds can be used in conjunction with St Johns Wort to help in the alleviation of depression.
- **Prevention of Osteoporosis** - Pumpkin seeds are high in zinc, and are a natural protector against osteoporosis. Research has indicated that a low zinc intake is linked to higher rates of osteoporosis.
- **Natural Anti-Inflammatory** - Pumpkin seeds effectively reduce inflammation without the side-effects of anti-inflammatory chemical drugs.
- **Prevention of Kidney Stones** - According to studies, pumpkin seeds can help to prevent calcium oxalate kidney stones from forming.
- **Treatment of Parasites** - Pumpkin seeds have ever been a folk remedy, and many cultures have employed them as a natural treatment for tapeworms and other parasites. Studies have also shown that pumpkin seeds are effective against acute schistosomiasis - a parasite contracted from snails.

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Other Health Benefits of Pumpkin Seeds

Other health benefit of pumpkin seeds include:

- **Pumpkin Seeds - an Adjunct in Prostate Health** - Benign prostatic hypertrophy (BPH) is a condition that commonly affects western men, 50 years and older. BPH involves enlargement of the prostate gland; and one of the factors that contributes to BPH is the overstimulation of prostate cells by testosterone and its conversion product, dihydrotestosterone (DHT). Components in pumpkin seed oil appear to interrupt the triggering of prostate cell multiplication by testosterone and DHT. However, the exact mechanism for this effect is still a mystery. The prostate-helpful components found in the oil extracts are also found in the whole seeds - 125 to 250 grams of pumpkin seeds daily is a typical recommendation. The carotenoids and omega-3 fats, found in pumpkin seeds, are also believed to have very positive prostate benefits. Studies have confirmed that men with higher amounts of carotenoids in their diet appear to have less risk for BPH.

Zinc is another nutrient found in pumpkin seeds that may also positively impact prostate function. However, studies regarding zinc and BPH have shown show mixed results, and more research is needed.

- **Bone Protection for Men** - A good reason for older men to make zinc-rich foods, such as pumpkin seeds, a part of their supplementation is bone mineral density. Although osteoporosis is often thought to be a disease for which postmenopausal women are at highest risk, it is also a potential problem for older men. Almost 30% of hip fractures occur in men, and 1 in 8 men over age 50 will have an osteoporotic fracture. A study of almost 400 men ranging in age from 45-92 that was published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found a clear correlation between low dietary intake of zinc, and osteoporosis at the hip and spine.
- **Anti-Inflammatory Benefits in Arthritis** - The healing properties of pumpkin seeds have also been investigated with respect to arthritis. In animal studies, the addition of pumpkin

seeds to the diet has noted a reduction in inflammatory symptoms. Moreover, pumpkin seeds do not increase the level of damaged fats (lipid peroxides) in the linings of the joints, which is a side-effect of allopathic drug treatment that actually contributes to the progression of arthritis.

- **A Rich Source of Healthful Minerals, Protein and Monounsaturated Fat** - Pumpkin seeds also provide a wide range of traditional nutrients, including magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, iron, copper, protein, and zinc. Snack on 65 grams of pumpkin seeds and you will receive 46.1% of the daily value for magnesium, 28.7% for iron, 52.0% for manganese, 24.0% for copper, 16.9% for protein, and 17.1% for zinc.
- **Phytosterols in Pumpkin Seeds Lower Cholesterol** - Phytosterols are compounds found in plants which have a chemical structure very similar to cholesterol, and when present in the diet in sufficient amounts, they are believed to reduce blood levels of cholesterol, to enhance the immune response, and to decrease risk of certain cancers.

Phytosterols beneficial effects are so dramatic that they have been extracted from soybean, corn, and pine tree oil and then added to processed foods, such as "butter"-replacement spreads, which are then offered as "cholesterol-lowering products". So, if you want to reap the benefit of Phytosterols, pumpkin seeds are a good choice and are naturally rich source of phytosterols-and cardio-protective fibre, minerals and healthy fats as well.

In a study in the United States *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, researchers published the amounts of phytosterols present in commonly eaten nuts and seeds:

Of the nuts and seeds typically consumed as snack foods, pistachios and sunflower seeds were richest in phytosterols (270-289 mg/100 grams), closely followed by pumpkin seeds (265 mg/100 g). (100 grams is equivalent to 3.5 ounces.) Sesame seeds had the highest total phytosterol content (400-413 mg per 100 grams) of all nuts and seeds, while English walnuts and Brazil nuts had the lowest (113 mg/100 grams and 95 mg/100 grams).

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Home Preparation of Pumpkin Seeds:

Pumpkin seeds are readily available in shops, however, it is very easy to make your own. To do so, first remove the seeds from the pumpkin and remove any excess pulp. Spread the seeds out evenly on waxed paper and let them dry out overnight.

Place them in a single layer on a shallow baking tray and light roast them at 75 degrees C) in an oven for 15-20 minutes. By roasting them at a low temperature, for a short time, this will help to preserve their healthy oils.

Pumpkin seeds should be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator. While pumpkin seeds stay edible for several months, they seem to lose their "peak freshness" after four to eight weeks.

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