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## 9 Impressive Health Benefits of Beets

Beetroots, commonly known as beets, are a popular root vegetable used in many cuisines around the world. Beets are packed with essential vitamins, minerals and plant compounds, some of which have medicinal properties.

What's more, they are delicious and easy to add to your diet. This article lists 9 health benefits of beets, all supported by science.

### 1. Many Nutrients in Few Calories

Beets boast an impressive nutritional profile. They are low in calories, yet high in valuable vitamins and minerals. In fact, they contain a bit of almost all the vitamins and minerals that you need.

Here is an overview of the nutrients found in a 3.5-ounce (100-gram) serving of cooked beetroot:

**Calories:** 44

**Protein:** 1.7 grams

**Fat:** 0.2 grams

**Fiber:** 2 grams

**Vitamin C:** 6% of the RDI

**Folate:** 20% of the RDI

**Vitamin B6:** 3% of the RDI

**Magnesium:** 6% of the RDI

**Potassium:** 9% of the RDI

**Phosphorous:** 4% of the RDI

**Manganese:** 16% of the RDI

**Iron:** 4% of the RDI



Beets also contain inorganic nitrates and pigments, both of which are plant compounds that have a number of health benefits.

### 2. Help Keep Blood Pressure in Check

Heart disease, including heart attacks, heart failure and stroke, is one of the leading causes of death worldwide. High blood pressure is one of the leading risk factors for the development of these conditions. Studies have shown that beets can significantly lower blood pressure by up to 4–10 mmHg over a period of only a few hours. The effect appears to be greater for systolic blood pressure, or pressure when your heart contracts, rather than diastolic blood pressure, or pressure when your heart is relaxed. The effect may also be stronger for raw beets than cooked beets. These blood pressure-lowering effects are likely due to the high concentration of nitrates in beets. In your body, dietary nitrates are converted into nitric oxide, a molecule that dilates blood vessels, causing blood pressure to drop.

Blood nitrate levels remain elevated for about six hours after eating dietary nitrate. Therefore, beets only have a temporary effect on blood pressure, and regular consumption is required to experience long-term reductions in blood pressure.

### 3. Can Improve Athletic Performance

Several studies suggest that dietary nitrates may enhance athletic performance. For this reason, beets are often used by athletes. Nitrates appear to affect physical performance by improving the efficiency of mitochondria, which are responsible for producing energy in your cells.

In two studies including seven and eight men, consuming 17 ounces (500 ml) of beet juice daily for six days extended time to exhaustion during high-intensity exercise by 15–25%, which is a 1–2% improvement in overall performance.

Eating beets may also improve cycling and athletic performance and increase oxygen use by up to 20%.

One small study of nine competitive cyclists looked at the effect of 17 ounces (500 ml) of beetroot juice on cycling time trial performance over 2.5 and 10 miles (4 and 16.1 km). Drinking beetroot juice improved performance by 2.8% over the 2.5-mile (4-km) time trial and 2.7% over the 10-mile (16.1-km) trial.

It's important to note that blood nitrate levels peak within 2–3 hours. Therefore, to maximize their potential, it's best to consume beets 2–3 hours before training or competing.

### 4. May Help Fight Inflammation

Chronic inflammation is associated with a number of diseases, such as obesity, heart disease, liver disease and cancer. Beets contain pigments called **betalains**, which may potentially possess a number of anti-inflammatory properties. However, most of the research in this area has been conducted in rats. Beetroot juice and beetroot extract have been shown to reduce kidney inflammation in rats injected with toxic chemicals known to induce serious injury.

One study in humans with osteoarthritis showed that betalain capsules made with beetroot extract reduced pain and discomfort associated with the condition. While these studies suggest that beets have an anti-inflammatory effect, human studies are needed to determine whether beets could be used to reduce inflammation.

### 5. May Improve Digestive Health

Dietary fiber is an important component of a healthy diet. It has been linked to many health benefits, including improved digestion. One cup of beetroot contains 3.4 grams of fiber, making beets a good fiber source. Fiber bypasses digestion and heads down to the colon, where it either feeds the friendly gut bacteria or adds bulk to stool. This can promote digestive health, keep you regular and prevent digestive conditions like constipation, inflammatory bowel disease and diverticulitis. Moreover, fiber has been linked to a reduced risk of chronic diseases including colon cancer, heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

### 6. May Help Support Brain Health

Mental and cognitive function naturally decline with age. For some, this decline is significant and may result in conditions like dementia. A reduction in blood flow and oxygen supply to the brain may contribute to this decline. Interestingly, the nitrates in beets may improve mental and cognitive function by promoting the dilation of blood vessels and thus increasing blood flow to the brain. Beets have been shown to particularly improve blood flow to the frontal lobe of the brain, an area associated with higher-level thinking, such as decision making and working memory. Furthermore, one study in type 2 diabetics looked at the effect of beets on simple reaction time, which is a measure of cognitive function.

Simple reaction time during a computer-based cognitive function test was 4% faster in those who consumed 8.5 ounces (250 ml) of beetroot juice daily for two weeks, compared to the placebo.

However, whether beets could be used in a clinical setting to improve brain function and reduce the risk of dementia remains to be seen.

## 7. May Have Some Anti-Cancer Properties

Cancer is a serious and potentially fatal disease characterized by the uncontrolled growth of cells. The antioxidant content and anti-inflammatory nature of beets have led to an interest in its ability to prevent cancer. However, the current evidence is fairly limited.

Beetroot extract has been shown to reduce the division and growth of tumor cells in animals.

One test-tube study using human cells found that beetroot extract, which is high in betalain pigments, reduced the growth of prostate and breast cancer cells.

It is important to note that these studies were performed in isolated human cells and rats. Further research is necessary to determine whether similar effects would be found in living, breathing humans.

## 8. May Help You Lose Weight

Beets have several nutritional properties that should make them good for weight loss. First, beets are low in calories and high in water. Increasing your intake of low-calorie foods like fruits and vegetables has been associated with weight loss. Furthermore, despite their low calorie content, beets contain moderate amounts of protein and fiber. These are both important nutrients for achieving and maintaining a healthy weight. The fiber in beets may also help promote weight loss by reducing appetite and promoting feelings of fullness, thereby reducing overall calorie intake. While no studies have directly tested the effects of beets on weight, it's likely that adding beets to your diet can aid in weight loss.

## 9. Delicious and Easy to Include in Your Diet

This last one is not a health benefit, yet it is still important. Not only are beets nutritious, but they are also incredibly delicious and easy to incorporate into your diet. Beets can be juiced, roasted, steamed or pickled. Also, they can be bought precooked and canned for convenience. Choose beets that are heavy for their size with fresh, unwilted green leafy tops still attached. Dietary nitrates are water soluble, so it is best to avoid boiling beets to maximize their nitrate content.

Here are some delicious and interesting ways to add more beets to your diet:

**Beetroot salad:** Grated beets make a flavorful and colorful addition to coleslaw.

**Beetroot dip:** Beets blended with Greek yogurt make a delicious and healthy dip.

**Beetroot juice:** Fresh beetroot juice is best, as store-bought juice can be high in added sugars and may only contain a small amount of beets.

**Beetroot leaves:** Beet leaves can be cooked and enjoyed like spinach, so don't throw them out.

## The Bottom Line

Beets provide some impressive health benefits. Not to mention, they are low in calories and a great source of nutrients, including fiber, folate and vitamin C. Beets also contain nitrates and pigments that may help lower blood pressure and improve athletic performance.

Lastly, beets are delicious and versatile, fitting well into a healthy and balanced diet.

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