

NOTE: Some sentiments contained within "What We're Reading" articles may not strictly conform with Simple Again's nutritional outlook. We read articles containing opposing information all the time and derive our nutritional philosophies from the latest science, the opinions of experts worldwide and our anecdotal experiences in the field. We keep an open mind and a strong affinity for fact-based evidence to help make the world of nutrition "Simple Again" for you.

6 Surprising Health Benefits of Sweet Potatoes

Sweet potatoes are sweet, starchy root vegetables that are grown worldwide. They come in a variety of sizes and colors — including orange, white, and purple — and are rich in vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fiber. Not to mention, they provide a number of health benefits and are easy to add to your diet. Here are 6 surprising health benefits of sweet potatoes.

1. Highly Nutritious

Sweet potatoes are a great source of fiber, vitamins, and minerals. One cup (200 grams) of baked sweet potato with skin provides:

- Calories: 180
- Carbs: 41.4 grams
- Protein: 4 grams
- Fat: 0.3 grams
- Fiber: 6.6 grams
- Vitamin A: 769% of the Daily Value (DV)
- Vitamin C: 65% of the DV
- Manganese: 50% of the DV
- Vitamin B6: 29% of the DV
- Potassium: 27% of the DV
- Pantothenic acid: 18% of the DV
- Copper: 16% of the DV
- Niacin: 15% of the DV



In addition, sweet potatoes — especially the orange and purple varieties — are rich in antioxidants that protect your body from free radicals. Free radicals are unstable molecules that can damage DNA and trigger inflammation. Free radical damage has been linked to chronic illnesses like cancer, heart disease, and aging. Therefore, eating antioxidant-rich foods is good for your health.

2. Promote Gut Health

The fiber and antioxidants in sweet potatoes are advantageous to gut health. Sweet potatoes contain two types of fiber: soluble and insoluble. Your body cannot digest either type. Therefore, fiber stays within your digestive tract and provides a variety of gut-related health benefits. Certain types of soluble fiber — known as viscous fibers — absorb water and soften your stool. On the other hand, non-viscous, insoluble fibers don't absorb water and add bulk. Some soluble and insoluble fibers can also be fermented by the bacteria in your colon, creating compounds called short-chain fatty acids that fuel the cells of your intestinal lining and keep them healthy and strong. Fiber-rich diets containing 20–33 grams per day have been linked to a lower risk of colon cancer and more regular bowel movements. The antioxidants in sweet potatoes may provide gut

benefits as well. Test-tube studies have found that antioxidants in purple sweet potatoes promote the growth of healthy gut bacteria, including certain Bifidobacterium and Lactobacillus species. Greater amounts of these types of bacteria within the intestines are associated with better gut health and a lower risk of conditions like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and infectious diarrhea.

3. May Have Cancer-Fighting Properties

Sweet potatoes offer various antioxidants, which may help protect against certain types of cancers. Anthocyanins — a group of antioxidants found in purple sweet potatoes — have been found to slow the growth of certain types of cancer cells in test-tube studies, including those of the bladder, colon, stomach, and breast. Similarly, mice fed diets rich in purple sweet potatoes showed lower rates of early-stage colon cancer — suggesting that the anthocyanins in the potatoes may have a protective effect. Extracts of orange sweet potatoes and sweet potato peels have also been found to have anti-cancer properties in test-tube studies. However, studies have yet to test these effects in humans.

4. Support Healthy Vision

Sweet potatoes are incredibly rich in beta-carotene, the antioxidant responsible for the vegetable's bright orange color. In fact, one cup (200 grams) of baked orange sweet potato with skin provides more than seven times the amount of beta-carotene that the average adult needs per day. Beta-carotene is converted to vitamin A in your body and used to form light-detecting receptors inside your eyes. Severe vitamin A deficiency is a concern in developing countries and can lead to a special type of blindness known as xerophthalmia. Eating foods rich in beta-carotene, such as orange-fleshed sweet potatoes, may help prevent this condition. Purple sweet potatoes also seem to have vision benefits. Test-tube studies have found that the anthocyanins they provide can protect eye cells from damage, which may be significant to overall eye health.

5. May Enhance Brain Function

Consuming purple sweet potatoes may improve brain function. Animal studies have found that the anthocyanins in purple sweet potatoes can protect the brain by reducing inflammation and preventing free radical damage. Supplementing with anthocyanin-rich sweet potato extract has been shown to improve learning and memory in mice, possibly due to its antioxidant properties. No studies have been done to test these effects in humans, but in general, diets rich in fruits, vegetables, and antioxidants are associated with a 13% lower risk of mental decline and dementia.

6. May Support Your Immune System

Orange-fleshed sweet potatoes are one of the richest natural sources of beta-carotene, a plant-based compound that is converted to vitamin A in your body. Vitamin A is critical to a healthy immune system, and low blood levels have been linked to reduced immunity. It's also key for maintaining healthy mucous membranes, especially in the lining of your gut. The gut is where your body is exposed to many potential disease-causing pathogens. Therefore, a healthy gut is an important part of a healthy immune system. Studies have shown that vitamin A deficiency increases gut inflammation and reduces the ability of your immune system to respond properly to potential threats. No studies have been conducted to determine whether sweet potatoes, in particular, have an effect on immunity, but eating them regularly can help prevent vitamin A deficiency.

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