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The 13 Healthiest Root Vegetables

Root vegetables have long been enjoyed as a delicious part of a healthy diet. Defined as an edible plant that grows underground, potatoes, carrots and onions are a few common examples that most are familiar with. However, there are many other types — each with a distinct set of nutrients and health benefits. Here are the 13 healthiest root vegetables to add to your diet.

1. Onions

Onions are popular root vegetables, serving as a staple ingredient in many cuisines. They're high in fiber, vitamin C and antioxidants. Antioxidants are compounds that can protect your cells against oxidative damage and help prevent disease. Research shows that eating onions may be associated with a wide array of health benefits. For instance, one study found that eating 3.5 ounces (100 grams) of raw onions per day significantly reduced blood sugar levels in people with diabetes. What's more, other research observed that onions may possess powerful anticancer properties, with observational studies linking a higher intake of this root vegetable to a lower risk of common types of cancer. Onions work well in a variety of meals and can easily be added to salads, soups, scrambled eggs, casseroles, rice or pasta dishes and many more.



2. Sweet Potatoes

Sweet potatoes are vibrant and delicious root vegetables that are highly nutritious and jam-packed with health benefits. They're rich in fiber, vitamin C, manganese and vitamin A and a good source of several antioxidants — including beta-carotene, chlorogenic acid and anthocyanins. A review of three studies showed that eating 4 grams of white sweet potato extract each day for 12 weeks improved blood sugar control in people with diabetes. Due to their vitamin A content, some studies suggest that this root vegetable may also improve immune function, protect against vision loss and support skin health. Sweet potatoes can be baked, boiled, roasted or sautéed and enjoyed as a delicious side dish or added to everything from sandwiches to salads to breakfast bowls.

3. Turnips

Turnips are a delicious root vegetable and have been cultivated for centuries. They have an impressive nutrient profile, being a great source of vitamin C, fiber, manganese and potassium. Adding vitamin C to your diet can help boost your immunity, with one study noting that getting enough of this vitamin could help reduce symptoms and shorten the severity of respiratory infections, such as the common cold. Additionally, studies show that consuming more cruciferous vegetables, such as turnips, may be associated with a lower risk of stomach, breast, colorectal and lung cancer. Turnips can be swapped into nearly any recipe in place of potatoes. Try making turnip fries, coleslaw, stir-fry or salad.

4. Ginger

Ginger is a flowering plant from China that is closely related to other root vegetables like turmeric. It's loaded with antioxidants, including a specific compound called gingerol, which has been associated with a long list of health benefits. One study in 1,278 pregnant women found that ginger was effective at reducing nausea and morning sickness. It may also decrease pain and inflammation, with other research showing that ginger extract could help relieve menstrual pain and reduce symptoms in people with osteoarthritis. Ginger makes a great addition to tea, soups, smoothies and stews and can bring a zesty zing to just about any dish.

5. Beets

Beets are one of the most nutritious root vegetables available, packing a good amount of fiber, folate and manganese into each serving. They're also high in nitrates, which are beneficial plant compounds that can help dilate your blood vessels, potentially lowering blood pressure and improving heart health. Studies also show that eating beets may improve exercise performance and increase blood flow to your brain. Additionally, animal studies have found that beetroot extract may have anticancer properties and may slow the growth and spread of cancer cells. To take advantage of the unique health benefits of beets, try roasting, juicing, pickling, boiling or steaming this delicious root vegetable.

6. Garlic

Garlic is a root vegetable that belongs to the *Allium* genus and is closely related to onions, leeks, chives and shallots. Each serving of garlic boasts a good amount of several important nutrients, including manganese, vitamin B6 and vitamin C. Plus, it's well-known for its medicinal properties, which are mostly attributed to the compound allicin, which is released when cloves of garlic are crushed, chewed or chopped. Studies have found that garlic can promote heart health by lowering blood pressure and levels of total cholesterol and triglyceride. It may also boost immune function, as research shows that it can decrease symptom severity and help prevent infections, such as the common cold. Best of all, garlic is highly versatile and can be used to amplify the flavor of your favorite savory soups, sauces, side dishes and main courses.

7. Radishes

Radishes may be small, but they manage to pack a punch when it comes to nutrition. They're low in carbs and calories yet contain a good amount of fiber and vitamin C. Radishes also have antifungal properties and have been effective against several types of fungus in test-tube and animal studies. Not only that, but one rat study found that the leaves of the radish plant may protect against stomach ulcers. Radishes are great for bringing a bit of crunch to your meals or snacks. Try adding slices to slaws, sandwiches, salads or tacos to give your dish a nutritious and tasty upgrade.

8. Fennel

Known for its licorice-like flavor, fennel is a flowering plant species closely related to carrots. In addition to supplying very few calories per serving, fennel packs fiber, vitamin C, potassium and manganese. It also contains the compound anethole, which gives fennel its distinct flavor, aroma and a wide array of health benefits. One rat study showed that anethole was able to modify some of the enzymes involved in the metabolism of carbs to help reduce blood sugar levels. What's more, test-tube studies observed that anethole has antimicrobial properties and may inhibit the growth of bacteria. Fennel can be enjoyed fresh, roasted or sautéed, as well as mixed into salads, soups, sauces and pasta dishes.

9. Carrots

As one of the most well-known root vegetables, carrots also top the charts as one of the most nutritious. They're brimming with vitamins A and K, as well as the important antioxidant beta-carotene. Eating carrots has been

linked to improved antioxidant status and lower cholesterol levels in both humans and animals. Other research shows that a higher intake of carotenoids, such as beta-carotene, may be associated with a lower risk of certain types of cancer, including breast, prostate and stomach cancer. What's more, eating carotenoids may protect against age-related macular degeneration (AMD), the leading cause of vision loss. Carrots make a great snack when eaten raw or dipped in hummus, but they can also be cooked and used in stir-fries, stews or side dishes.

10. Celeriac

Also known as celery root, celeriac is a highly versatile and delicious root vegetable that's easy to cook and enjoy. It contains a hearty dose of vitamin C and phosphorus and is also an excellent source of vitamin K, squeezing in 80% of the daily recommended value in a single one-cup (156-gram) serving. Vitamin K is an essential nutrient, necessary for proper blood clotting. It's also needed for the function of osteocalcin, a protein hormone that is key for your bone health. Celeriac has a nutty taste and crunchy texture that works especially well in salads. It can also be boiled, roasted, baked or mashed and used in place of potatoes in nearly any recipe.

11. Turmeric

Turmeric is a type of root vegetable that belongs to the same plant family as ginger and cardamom. The rhizomes, or root, of the plant are often ground into a spice, which is used to add a splash of color, flavor and health benefits to many dishes. Turmeric contains a compound called curcumin, which has been shown to prevent blood clot formation, lower cholesterol levels and reduce markers of inflammation in both test-tube and animal studies. Research in humans also suggests that curcumin may alleviate joint pain, stabilize blood sugar levels and decrease symptoms of depression. Turmeric is widely available as a spice and can be added to both savory and sweet recipes, as well as drinks, such as golden turmeric milk. To reap its benefits, be sure to pair turmeric with black pepper, as the latter contains a compound that can significantly boost the absorption of curcumin in your gut.

12. Potatoes

Potatoes are incredibly versatile and widely available, with up to 2,000 different varieties currently cultivated in 160 countries around the world. They're also very nutritious, packing a good chunk of fiber, vitamin C, vitamin B6, potassium and manganese. Potatoes that have been cooked and cooled are also high in resistant starch, a type of starch that passes undigested through your digestive tract and helps feed your beneficial gut bacteria. Not to mention, boiled potatoes are an incredibly filling food, keeping you feeling fuller for longer, which may promote weight loss. Steer clear of fried potatoes or processed potato products, which are often high in fat, salt and calories yet lacking in nutrition. Instead, select baked, boiled or steamed potatoes to get the most nutrients.

13. Rutabaga

Rutabagas are root vegetables that belong to the mustard family and are commonly cultivated for their edible leaves and roots. Each serving of rutabagas supplies plenty of vitamin C, potassium and manganese along with disease-fighting antioxidants. Rutabagas are also a good source of fiber, which can help support your digestive health and lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels. They also provide glucosinolates, sulfur-containing compounds that are commonly found in cruciferous vegetables that may help protect against cancer cell development and growth and prevent oxidative stress. Rutabaga can be mashed, baked or roasted and enjoyed in soups, salads, noodles and even desserts.

The Bottom Line

Plenty of nutritious and delicious root vegetables exist — each with a unique set of health benefits. From reducing oxidative stress to preventing chronic disease, adding a serving or two of root vegetables to your daily diet can be incredibly beneficial. For best results, combine these tasty root vegetables with a variety of other nutrient-rich ingredients to help optimize your diet and your health.

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