



Pumpkin seeds pack a lot of punch

My family loves snacking on pumpkin seeds. I've heard they're quite nutritious — are they?

Pumpkin seeds are incredibly nutritious. A 1-ounce portion — about 85 seeds, just shy of a half-cup — contains about 125 calories. They are classified as “nutrient-dense” because they contain a wide variety of minerals.

Of special interest is the amount of zinc found in pumpkin seeds — about 3 milligrams in 1 ounce. That's a significant amount, given that women should get just 8 milligrams of zinc a day, and men should get 11 milligrams. Zinc helps keep the skin healthy, and helps the body heal wounds and fight off illnesses and infections.

Pumpkin seeds are also a reliable source of iron, offering about 1 milligram of the 18 milligrams adults should get a day. An ounce of pumpkin seeds also offers about 5 grams of protein and 5 grams of fiber.

The health benefits of the oil in pumpkin seeds have been widely examined. A 2007 study in the *Journal of Agricultural Food Chemistry* outlined the benefits that previous research had uncovered, including preventing the growth and reducing the size of the prostate; slowing the progression of high blood pressure; mitigating high cholesterol, arthritis and diabetes; and possibly a lower risk of gastric, breast, lung and colorectal cancers.

Pumpkin seeds are also good

sources of the amino acid tryptophan, which the body uses to help make niacin, a B vitamin, and serotonin. Serotonin is thought to promote healthy sleep and a stable mood.

One thing to be on the watch for is sodium content. By roasting pumpkin seeds yourself, you can easily control (or completely eliminate) added salt. The amount of sodium in pumpkin seeds without salt added is a mere 5 milligrams per ounce; with salt added, it averages about 720 milligrams, but varies widely. If you're buying pumpkin seeds, be sure to look at the sodium content on the Nutrition Facts label so you know what you're eating.

Pumpkin seed kernels are also available — that's the seed without the outer husk. A 1-ounce portion — less than one-quarter cup — has about 160 calories. They offer about the same amount of zinc as regular pumpkin seeds, as well as about 1.5 times the amount of protein and of tryptophan, and about twice the iron. However, you lose most of the fiber: less than 2 grams of fiber remain when you enjoy the kernel without the husk.

Making your own pumpkin seeds is easy. After carving open a pumpkin and rinsing off the seeds, spread them on a baking sheet coated with cooking spray and heat until they're crisp.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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