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The Health Benefits of Pumpkin

Whether or not you look forward to the pumpkin-spice-everything phenomenon that seems to happen each fall, there are many reasons to incorporate this humble squash into your diet. Pumpkin isn't thought of as a healthy option because it often makes its appearance in high-sugar foods like pie and lattes. But pumpkin is high in many nutrients that people don't get enough of, and it can easily be incorporated into savory foods as well as sweet.

Pumpkin is low in calories and high in fiber, which can help maintain healthy weight and also feed your gut microbiome.

Pumpkin is high in vitamin A, which is important for eye health and may slow the development of macular degeneration, a common age-related eye disorder that can impact vision. One cup of pumpkin contains nearly twice the recommended daily value for vitamin A.

Pumpkin is also high in vitamin C, which is essential for immune function.

Pumpkin gets its bright orange color from the presence of carotenoids, pigments that act as antioxidants in the body, and may help prevent cancer.

Pumpkin is also high in both magnesium and potassium, two minerals linked to heart health that many people do not get enough of.

The best source of all these nutrients is of course fresh pumpkin. However, it can be challenging to prepare, and the good news is, canned pumpkin has a very similar nutritional profile as fresh. Just be sure to look for canned pumpkin that is 100% pumpkin, without added sugar or other ingredients.

Pumpkin seeds, or pepitas, are also tiny nutritional powerhouses. They are high in essential omega-3 fatty acids, which are essential for immune, heart, and blood vessel health. They are also high in zinc, which can also boost the immune system. And they are a good source of plant-based protein.

Incorporating pumpkin into the diet can be tricky, as it is usually associated with sweet foods like pumpkin pie, pumpkin cheesecake, and of course the pumpkin spice latte, which packs a whopping 380 calories, with lots of added sugar and fat. But pumpkin can also be incorporated into savory dishes, and making pumpkin recipes at home, even if they are on the sweeter side, allows you to control the amount of sugar.

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The Health Benefits of Pumpkin (continued)

Pumpkin can be roasted or grilled as a nice accompaniment to poultry and other meats, or added to salads or sandwiches for a sweet note. Puree roasted pumpkin for a silky pumpkin soup. Small pumpkins can be hollowed out, stuffed with ingredients of your choice, and roasted until tender. Canned pumpkin can be an easy, healthy addition to oatmeal and smoothies. And pepitas are a great addition to salads, wraps, granola, oatmeal, sprinkled on soups, or just eaten by the handful as a snack.



And there is nothing unhealthy about pumpkin spice itself—it's usually a blend of cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, and ginger, all of which are good sources of antioxidants and phytochemicals. Just go easy on the sugar when you add it to your favorite hot beverages, baked goods, yogurt, or cereal.

Are you passionate about...

Health & Wellness, Cooking,
Gardening, Fitness, Dancing,
Cultural Diversity, Health Education
or Journalism?

Become a Wellness Ambassador for your campus!

Contact Margaret Clayton,
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Sonoma County Healing Center: Summer of Wellness

by Francisco Palmerin-Ramirez, Director of Dietary Services at Sonoma County Healing Center

All summer long, Crestwood Sonoma County Healing Center was in full swing promoting staff wellness. July was another successful spirit month for the Santa Rosa campus, which we wrapped up with an Ice Cream Social!

Spirit Months have become a part of the Sonoma County Healing Center culture that helps build a sense of community and boosts staff morale. Every other month, staff can participate in a dress-up day once a week for the whole month. July spirit days included: Red, White, and Blue Day; Cartoon T-Shirt Day; Department Color Day; Hat Day; and Neon Color Day. Other past spirit months have included: Twin Day; Flannel Day; Band T-Shirt Day; and Stripes Day. To add to the fun, participating staff are entered into a raffle for the chance to win prizes such as a spa gift card, car wash, or fair tickets!

To wrap up spirit month in July, staff enjoyed an ice cream social highlighting National Ice Cream Month! Staff were invited to enjoy a scoop of ice cream with their peers. Events like this have helped foster teambuilding and communication at our site. Not only are we treating our staff, but we are allowing them time to build connections that help strengthen our campus overall.

Along with the frozen treats, Wellness Meals were cooked by the Dietary Department for staff to enjoy. Wellness Meals are another staple in staff wellness at Sonoma County Healing Center. Twice a month, the Dietary Department cooks up meals for staff such as turkey burgers and chili lime steak salad in June. For July, staff were treated to flatbread pizza and turkey wraps. In August, chef salads were prepared, and the month ended with a Potluck BBQ. While the event was potluck style, it was the members of Leadership who brought in food. It is Leadership's special way to show appreciation to all our hard-working staff. We plan to end the summer with even more activities and treats for our staff!



What Bread is Best?

Now that we are (mostly) over the low-carb craze, you may be wondering what type of bread is the healthiest.

Most people know that whole grain bread is considered the healthier option. Whole grain bread is made from flour that uses the entire grain kernel, so it has more fiber, vitamins, and minerals than refined flour. The fiber in whole grain bread helps you feel full longer, causes a gradual rise in blood sugar rather than a spike, and helps feed the microorganisms that live in your gut. Refined flour, used to make white bread, has the bran and germ of the grain removed, which also strips it of many nutrients. This flour is usually “enriched” or fortified with the missing nutrients that were removed in the refining process, but it still does not contain the fiber present in whole grain bread.



However, choosing bread is unfortunately not that simple. As anyone who has ever left a loaf of freshly baked bread on their counter knows, bread very quickly becomes stale and grows mold. But sliced bread from the grocery store magically stays soft and mold-free for days or even weeks. This is because many breads sold in the grocery store are full of preservatives and other ingredients that extend their shelf life and improve the texture and taste of the product. Store-bought bread may contain things like calcium propionate, potassium sorbate, potassium bromate, and high fructose corn syrup, to name a few. Some of these ingredients are likely harmless, while others have been linked to health problems in animals and humans. And none of them would be found in any ingredient list for home-made bread or be found in a home pantry.

So, the real answer to which bread is the healthiest is not found on the front of its packaging, or even its nutrition label, but in its ingredient list. Real bread should contain very few ingredients. In its most basic form, it will contain just flour, yeast, and salt. Many bread recipes will also contain some fat like oil and maybe a source of sugar. And of course, there are endless variations that can be made with different types of flours, seeds, nuts, fruits, herbs, and other whole-food additions. The key point here is that none of those ingredients require a degree in chemistry to pronounce or recognize.

Sprouted grain bread is made from whole grains that have started to sprout, or germinate. This process breaks down some of the starch, which makes the bread easier to digest and lower in carbohydrates. As seeds begin to sprout, some of the nutrients become more bioavailable, or able to be used by our bodies. Sprouted bread also tends to be higher in protein, fiber, B vitamins, and vitamin C.

Oat bread and rye bread are also good choices, as they are high in fiber, which can help lower cholesterol and regulate blood sugar levels.

Sourdough bread is traditionally made with just flour, water, salt, and sourdough starter, which contains bacteria and yeasts that give the bread its characteristic texture and tang. Even though this bread is usually made with refined flour, it has unique health benefits due to the types of microorganisms that create it. Lactic acid bacteria and yeasts break down carbohydrates in the bread, creating prebiotics like inulin, which in turn feed the microorganisms in our guts. Sourdough bread consumption has also been associated with better blood sugar and cholesterol levels, and due to the fermentation process, it tends to have less gluten than other types of bread, which may make it easier to digest for those with gluten sensitivity.

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What Bread is Best? (continued)



A note about gluten. Gluten is a protein found in wheat, barley and rye. Unless you have Celiac disease, which is an allergy to gluten, gluten is usually harmless. Some people experience gluten sensitivity (or gluten intolerance as it is sometimes called), but there are no diagnostic tests for this, and the type of damage seen in people with Celiac disease when exposed to gluten does not occur in those with gluten sensitivity. Nonetheless, gluten sensitivity is a recognized diagnosis, and an estimated 6% of the population may experience it. The only way to determine if you have gluten sensitivity is to eliminate gluten from your diet for a period of time and see if the suspected gluten-related symptoms disappear.

Unnecessarily eliminating gluten from your diet can, in fact, result in a nutritionally inferior diet, as wheat, barley and rye are good sources of calories, protein, fiber, B vitamins, and many other important nutrients. In addition, products traditionally made with gluten (like pasta, bread, and other baked goods) that are reformulated to be gluten-free are often highly processed as they try to mimic the taste and texture of the traditional products.

That being said, there are many gluten-free products on the market today that can be part of a healthy diet if you must avoid gluten. Just follow the same rules as you would when selecting any product and look for a short ingredient list with ingredients you recognize and might find in a home kitchen.

If you have the time and inclination, baking bread yourself is a great way to ensure the bread you are eating is healthy and additive-free. But if you don't have time to bake, consider choosing whole grain, sprouted grain, oat, rye or sourdough breads made with basic ingredients like flour, yeast, and salt. If you struggle to use up a whole loaf before it goes bad, consider tightly wrapping the bread and storing it in the refrigerator. This can slow the growth of microorganisms like yeast and extend the life of your fresh bread.



Spirituality Corner: Solvitur Ambulando

“It is Solved by Walking”

by Erin Lubniewski, Occupational Therapist at Crestwood Treatment Center Fremont

Traditionally, a pilgrimage was a long journey on foot to a sacred place for the purpose of religious devotion and spiritual growth. Today, the reasons people (or ‘pilgrims’), embark on pilgrimages also include **seeking greater meaning in their lives, personal transformation, cultural connection, and adventure.** As purposes have expanded, so has participation and popularity. For example, in 2024, nearly 500,000 pilgrims walked the Camino de Santiago to the shrine of the Apostle St. James in Spain. This particular pilgrimage became more popular after the release of the 2010 movie *The Way*, starring Martin Sheen and directed, produced, and written by his son, Emilio Estevez.

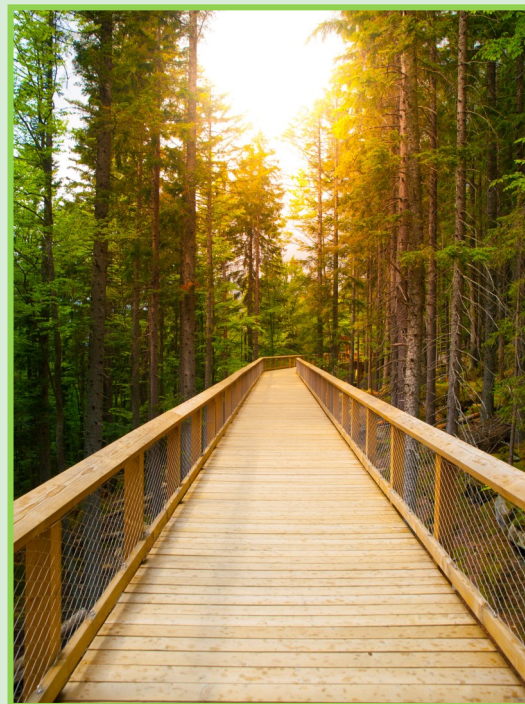
Other famous religious pilgrimages include: the Hajj to Mecca in Islam, the Ganges River in India for Hindus, Bodh Gaya in Buddhism, and Kumano Kodo in Japan. Less religious but equally spiritual includes trekking Mt. Everest in Nepal or the Inca Trail in Peru.

Regardless of the individual’s purpose for going on a pilgrimage, there are **common traits to any pilgrimage:**

- ◆ There is a specific destination, typically one of spiritual or religious importance.
- ◆ The purpose is to deepen connections within oneself or to one’s faith, to express devotion, or seek forgiveness.
- ◆ The journey to the destination is long, physically demanding, and involves hardships along the way.
- ◆ Hardships are considered part of the growth process and include hunger, exhaustion, and suffering.
- ◆ Pilgrims may connect with each other along the way and/or feel a connection with others who have gone before them in completing the pilgrimage.

Once you know the characteristics, you can’t help but see examples all around us. We see them in a Hero’s Journey in movies like *The Wizard of Oz*, in literature like *The Canterbury Tales*, and even the path athletes take to

make it to the Olympics. We might even see it in our own lives as we train for our first Turkey Trot or walk in a cap and gown to receive a diploma.



It is interesting that in our everyday lives we look for ways to minimize discomfort and hardships, but **pilgrimages teach us that experiencing hardships along the way is what helps us grow as we find deeper meaning and purpose in our lives.**

There is something transformative about combining physical movement with deep contemplation. The bishop and philosopher, Saint Augustine, is attributed as saying, “Solvitur ambulando” (“It is solved by walking”). The idea being that thinking alone can only take us so far in solving problems and that by adding some type of physical action, we can think more clearly and gain fresh perspectives or arrive at a solution.

There is power in stepping out of our comfortable front door with intention and finding meaning in the hardships along the way.

Recipe: Pumpkin Chai Latte

If you can't resist a warm pumpkin-flavored beverage on a crisp fall day, try this much healthier alternative to the notorious pumpkin spice latte. It is much lower in sugar and can easily be made vegan if desired by using plant-based milk and maple syrup instead of honey.

Ingredients

- 1 spiced chai tea bag
- ½ cup of milk of choice
- 2 tbsp 100% pumpkin puree
- ½ tbsp maple syrup or honey
- ¼ tsp pumpkin spice (or a combination of cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and cloves)
- ¼ tsp vanilla extract



Directions: In a small saucepan, bring about ½ cup of water to a boil. Remove from heat and add the tea bag, letting it steep for 5 minutes or so. Add the rest of the ingredients and blend in a mixer or with an immersion blender until creamy. (Alternatively, you can put the ingredients in a jar with a lid and shake vigorously.) Pour the mixture back into the pan and gently rewarm on the stovetop, then pour into your favorite mug. If you are feeling particularly decadent, top with whipped cream and garnish with a cinnamon stick.

***“Pumpkin spice and everything nice,
that's what autumn is made of.”***

Any Health and Wellness News Questions?

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