



Carve a place for pumpkin in your diet

A friend of mine says canned pumpkin is about the healthiest thing you can eat. Can that be right?

Canned pumpkin (or fresh, for that matter) is, in fact, a healthful, filling food. Adding it to recipes, or substituting other ingredients with pumpkin, is a great way to boost the nutrition of the foods you eat without adding a lot of calories.

A half-cup of canned pumpkin has just 40 calories but is loaded with more than 3 grams of fiber and very little fat. It also offers more than three times the vitamin A you need in a day in the form of beta carotene — more than you'd get from most supplements. And it's also a good source of vitamin C, vitamin K, iron and manganese.

Fresh pumpkin that's been cubed, boiled and mashed has fewer calories (about 25 per half-cup), but also less fiber (about 1-2 grams per half-cup) and somewhat less of other nutrients, but it's still a healthful if less convenient choice. If opting for fresh, choose smaller "sugar" or "pie" pumpkins instead of the larger jack-o-lanterns for best results. You can also cook pumpkin, as you would any squash, by baking, microwaving or steaming it. Just rinse the outside well, cut it in half, scoop out the seeds and cook as desired until the flesh is soft.

If you decide canned pumpkin is a better option for you, choose a salt-free version; canned pumpkin with salt contains almost 300 milligrams

of sodium in a half-cup. And don't make the mistake of buying pumpkin pie filling, which has almost three times the calories, instead of canned pumpkin (sometimes called pureed pumpkin).

Ideas for using canned pumpkin are incredibly varied. The U.S. Department of Agriculture offers more than a dozen recipes using pumpkin on its Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Web site, <http://snap.nal.usda.gov/> (click on Recipes, then search for recipes containing "pumpkin").

Or, if you are an adventurous cook, try experimenting with your own recipes:

- Add canned or mashed cooked pumpkin to cookies, muffins, quick breads and pancakes. Experiment with the amount — pumpkin is moist, but too much can make products like these heavier than you're accustomed to.
- The next time you make a pot of chili, include a can of pumpkin. It helps thicken up the chili and gives it some stomach-filling substance with very few calories. The pumpkin flavor blends in with chili spices.
- Add pumpkin to soup (it's especially good with bean soup), or make a creamy pumpkin soup with canned or fresh pureed pumpkin, broth, onion, and milk, and flavored with cinnamon, nutmeg and pepper.

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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