

pumpkin seed power

ALSO KNOWN AS PEPITAS, MAGNESIUM-RICH PUMPKIN SEEDS ARE ESPECIALLY DELICIOUS IN AUTUMN WHEN YOU CAN ROAST THEM FRESH

By Elaine Magee, MPH, RD

Most of us only come across pumpkin seeds at Halloween as we're elbow deep in gunk, carving our obligatory jack-o'-lanterns. Then if you spend a little extra time, you're rewarded an hour or two later by the intoxicating aroma and flavor of roasted pumpkin seeds. What you may not realize, though, is that pumpkin seeds are nutrition powerhouses.

A Magnificent Source of Magnesium

Magnesium is involved in biochemical reactions that help keep bones strong and promote healthy heart rhythms and nervous system function. A magnesium-rich diet may also help reduce the risk of metabolic syndrome (a collection of risk factors leading to heart disease, stroke and diabetes).

Researchers from a multicenter study called CARDIA that followed thousands of adults over 15 years found that people with the highest magnesium intakes from foods were 30 percent less likely to develop metabolic syndrome than those with the lowest intakes.

All pretty important, right? But only about 32 percent of the US population

meets the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for magnesium, according to the Agricultural Research Service's Community Nutrition Research Group. The good news is that you can meet almost your entire daily magnesium requirement with a handful of roasted pumpkin seeds. Just ¼ cup contains about 300 milligrams of magnesium—95% of the RDA.

Bursting with B vitamins

Pumpkin seeds are also a great source of five of the B vitamins. One-quarter cup of roasted seeds contributes:

- 11% daily allowance of B1 (0.12 mg)
- 16% daily allowance of B2 (0.18 mg)
- 41% daily allowance of niacin (5.8 mg)
- 4% daily allowance of B6 (0.05 mg)
- 8% daily allowance of folic acid (32 mcg)

Packed with Protein

That same roasted handful also bumps up your protein by 19 grams—that's about 39 percent of the daily recommended amount of protein.

A Plant Source of Iron

Increase your iron by 8.5 milligrams

(almost half the RDA) each time you eat ¼ cup roasted seeds.

Rich in Monounsaturated and Polyunsaturated Fat

Most of the fatty acids in pumpkin seeds come from monounsaturated fat, and the polyunsaturated fats are omega-6 fatty acids. One-quarter cup contributes 7.4 grams of monounsaturated fat and 10.9 grams of polyunsaturated fat.

Calories and Fiber

A typical serving of roasted pumpkin seeds (¼ cup) contains 296 calories and 2g fiber (mostly insoluble).

Storage Tips

Refrigerate pumpkin seeds in an airtight container. Seeds lose freshness after one or two months, but can be frozen and stored for up to six months.

Easy Ways to Enjoy Them

Sprinkle the seeds over salads to boost the protein or stir into muffin mix for a little crunch. You can also add them to a homemade trail mix or use them to garnish the top of pumpkin bread.

Hot & Spicy Pumpkin Nut Mix

Serves 12

- 1 egg white
- 1 cup pumpkin seeds
- 1 cup whole almonds
- 1 cup walnuts, pecans or cashews
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar, packed
- ½ tsp. seasoning salt
- ½ tsp. curry powder
- ½ tsp. ground cinnamon
- ¼ to ½ tsp. cayenne pepper (or more to taste)

1. Preheat oven to 250 degrees. Put egg white in mixing bowl, and beat until foamy. Add pumpkin seeds, almonds and walnuts, and toss well to coat nuts with egg white.
2. Place remaining ingredients in small bowl, and blend well with fork. Add spice mixture to nuts, and stir to combine everything well.
3. Coat nonstick baking sheet with cooking spray, and spread nuts on sheet. Bake about 50 minutes, stirring after 30 minutes.
4. Cool for 15 minutes, and break into smaller pieces. Allow to cool completely, then store nut mix in airtight container up to 1 week.

PER SERVING: 196 CAL; 7G PROT; 17G TOTAL FAT (2G SAT. FAT); 8G CARB; 0MG CHOL; 66MG SOD; 2.5G FIBER; 3G SUGAR ■

Shopping for Pumpkin Seeds

Here are two examples of pumpkin seed products available at health food stores:



EDEN ORGANIC PUMPKIN SEEDS, DRY ROASTED



HEALTH BEST PEPITAS RAW



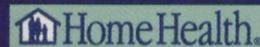
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