The Sweet Potency of the Sweet Potato

By Jon Finkel

While sweet potatoes usually only take center stage in our diets when they’re on the table at Thanksgiving dinner, the sheer magnitude of their health benefits may force you to reconsider eating this dessert-flavored vegetable on a nightly basis. With their impressive array of nutrients, from heavy doses of vitamin A, vitamin C, manganese and potassium, to its high fiber content, sweet potatoes have astounding health-boosting properties. In addition, the purple-fleshed variety of sweet potatoes are high in anthocyanins. Anthocyanins have important antioxidant capacities that make it a valuable component to any health maintenance regimen.

Improved insulin resistance was also discovered in a human study when sweet potatoes were added to the diet.

**SWEET POTATO’S TALE**

First things first: sweet potatoes aren’t even potatoes. Potatoes come from the Solanaceae family and sweet potatoes belong to the Convolvulaceae family, which is a group of plants that have trumpet-shaped flowers. Sweet potato relics have been found as long ago as 8,000 BC and the vegetables themselves were brought to Europe by Christopher Columbus after his first trip to North America in 1492. There are over 400 varieties, each differentiated by their subtle variations in skin color, ranging from purple to red to orange to yellow to white. The most common form of sweet potato has orange flesh and is often called a yam. It was given that name in the 1900s in the United States to help set it apart from the white-fleshed sweet potato that was popular during that time period.

**VALUABLE VEGETABLE**

In a study conducted by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, the sweet potato scored more than 100 points higher than a regular baked potato.

Echoing this study, the journal *Advances in Food and Nutrition Research* evaluated the sweet potato’s role in the human diet and concluded that its biochemical and nutritional composition make it an excellent source of natural health-promoting compounds. Among those compounds are beta-carotene, as stated earlier, and anthocyanins, which have shown potential health benefits against bacterial infections, diabetes, inflammation, aging and neurological disease, and cancer.

**SELECT THE RIGHT SWEET POTATO**

1. Do not store uncooked sweet potatoes in the refrigerator.
2. Store sweet potatoes in a dark, cool, and ventilated place.
3. Sweet potatoes will stay fresh for 10 days.
4. The darker varieties of sweet potato have the most carotene content.
5. Choose sweet potatoes that are firm.
6. Avoid sweet potatoes with bruises, soft spots, and cracks.

**BETA CAROTENE FOR THE BRAIN**

With its high beta-carotene content, eating sweet potatoes can offer improvement in a variety of areas where beta carotene
supplementation is recommended. One particular area where beta-carotene has shown promising results is with cognitive function in men. A study published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* showed that men supplementing with beta-carotene for one year scored significantly higher than those taking a placebo in general cognitive tests. When it came to boosting verbal memory, men receiving long-term beta-carotene supplementation also performed significantly better, leading the researchers to conclude that long-term supplementation with beta-carotene may provide cognitive benefits.

**DIABETES FIGHTER**

Diabetes is an **insidious disease** whose early symptoms include weakness, fatigue, weight loss and tingling in the hands and feet. Left untreated, the disease can have **lethal effects** on your health. In a study involving rats to determine sweet potato’s effects on several markers of diabetes, the vegetable showed **significant** abilities to potentially reel in some of the more harmful markers. Using white-fleshed sweet potatoes for the study, the rats showed impressive improvement in pancreatic cell function, lipid levels, and glucose management. They also showed reduced insulin resistance inside of just eight weeks. Improved insulin resistance was also discovered in a human study when sweet potatoes were added to the diet.

**POWERFUL TOOL AGAINST KIDNEY CANCER**

Incidence of kidney cancer is relatively high in Northern Europe and North America compared to Asia and scientists have been trying to find out what may cause the discrepancy.

A study in the *Journal of Epidemiology* states that one of the reasons may be the rate of ingestion of sweet potatoes in the diet of Asian cultures. The study, which was an analytic cohort that evaluated the risk factors for kidney cancer death using the Japan Collaborative Cohort Study (JACC), included 47,997 males and 66,520 females aged 40 years and older. Taking into account medical history, anthropometry, dietary and lifestyle considerations over the 10-year study, the researchers concluded that eating sweet potatoes and potatoes regularly was associated with a decreased risk of disease.

If you have any questions on the scientific content of this article, please call a Life Extension® Health Advisor at 1-866-864-3027.

**SWEET POTATO, BAKED, WITH SKIN 1 POTATO**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutrient</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>DV(%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin A</td>
<td>1310.69 RE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beta-carotene</td>
<td>7864.16 mcg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vitamin C</td>
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<td>28.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manganese</td>
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<td>Copper</td>
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<td>Dietary fiber</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vitamin B6 (pyridoxine)</td>
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<td>Potassium</td>
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**References**


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