AVOCADOS LOOK AS GOOD AS THEY TASTE AND DESPITE THEIR HIGH FAT CONTENT, ARE A SMART WAY TO BOOST YOUR HEALTH AND BEAUTY

By Laurel Vukovic

Ranked by the Guinness Book of World Records as the world’s most nutritious fruit, avocados offer a wealth of health and beauty benefits. Beloved around the world for their buttery richness and subtle nutty flavor, avocados are the fruit of Persea americana, a tall evergreen tree native to the subtropical Americas.

Health Benefits Galore

Until fairly recently, avocados were shunned because of their high fat content—almost three-quarters of an avocado is pure fat. But the fat found in avocados is of the health-protective monounsaturated variety, primarily oleic acid. Avocados contain more than 20 beneficial nutrients, including potassium, folate, copper, and vitamins C, B6, E, and K.

In numerous studies, the oleic acid found in avocados has been shown to help lower cholesterol levels. In one study, researchers compared a diet high in complex carbohydrates to a diet rich in avocados and other monounsaturated fatty acids. While both diets lowered total cholesterol levels, the avocado-enriched diet lowered cholesterol almost twice as much. Even more significant was that levels of beneficial high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol decreased by 13.9 percent on the high complex carbohydrate diet but remained steady on the avocado diet. Because HDL helps protect heart health, it’s essential to consume foods that help lower overall cholesterol while maintaining or increasing levels of HDL.

In addition to keeping the cardiovascular system healthy, avocados are proving to be important dietary allies in preventing cancer. Many studies have shown that oleic acid protects cells against the mutations that lead to cancer. Avocados also contain a variety of anticancer antioxidants, including vitamin E and the carotenoids lutein, alpha-carotene, beta-carotene, and zeaxanthin. Because carotenoids are best absorbed into the bloodstream when combined with dietary fat, avocados provide the perfect vehicle for delivering these nutrients to the cells.

Avocado oil is another delicious way of obtaining the health benefits of avocados. Cold-pressed from avocado pulp (minus the seed and skin), the oil is rich in monounsaturated fatty acids and low in saturated fats. Unrefined avocado oil is a vibrant green color, with an aroma similar to a combination of...
artichokes and celery and a rich avocado flavor. With a smoke point higher than any other vegetable or nut oil, avocado oil is a good choice for sautéing and is delicious in salad dressings and other cold dishes.

**Glowing Skin, Shiny Hair**
For optimal health and beauty, include avocados and avocado oil in your skin, hair, and body care products as well as your diet. The healthy fats in avocados and their oil are ideal skin and hair moisturizers and are excellent for dry skin, including stubborn skin problems such as eczema.

Researchers have found that avocado oil is more penetrating than commonly used oils such as almond, olive, safflower, and soy. Because of its excellent absorption, avocado oil is an ideal medium for transporting active ingredients beneath the epidermis (the outer layer of the skin) into the dermis, the deeper layer of the skin where cellular renewal takes place.

Avocado oil also has natural sunscreen properties, and can enhance the ability of products to protect the skin and hair from UVA and UVB rays. In tests, avocado oil proved to be a more effective sunscreen than jojoba, coconut, olive, sesame, and almond oils.

**holy guacamole! more reasons to slice and dice**
Avocados can help increase your absorption of carotenoids from vegetables. Here are the delicious details.

- **Enjoying avocado in your salad or salsa will not only add a rich, creamy flavor, but will also increase your body's ability to absorb the health-promoting carotenoids that vegetables provide.**
- **A study in the Journal of Nutrition tested the theory that since carotenoids are lipophilic (fat-loving, which means they are soluble in fat, not water), consuming carotenoid-rich foods along with monounsaturated-fat-rich avocado may enhance their bioavailability.**
- **Not only did adding avocado to a salad of carrot, lettuce, and baby spinach or to salsa greatly increase study participants' absorption of carotenoids from these foods, but the improvement in carotenoid availability occurred when as little as 2 ounces of avocado were added.**
- **Adding avocado to a salad made absorption of alpha-carotene, beta-carotene, and lutein 7.2, 15.3, and 5.1 times higher, respectively, than the average amount of these carotenoids absorbed from avocado-free salad.**
- **Adding avocado to salsa made lycopene and beta-carotene absorption 4.4 and 2.6 times higher, respectively, than the average amount of these nutrients absorbed from avocado-free salsa.**

Avocados contain a variety of nutrients, so eating a little avocado with carotenoid-rich vegetables and fruits is a good way to improve your body's ability to absorb carotenoids.

**ALLEVIATING ARTHRITIS PAIN**
Derived from Avocado and soybean oils, avocado/soybean unsaponifiables (ASU) are among the most promising arthritis remedies. Four high-quality clinical trials suggest that ASU supplements can improve the pain and stiffness of knee and hip osteoarthritis (OA) and reduce the need for nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). ASU appears to decrease inflammation and stimulate cartilage repair.

Jason Theodosakis, MD, author of The Arthritis Cure and champion of glucosamine and chondroitin, believes ASU will have a major impact on treatment of OA. In France, supplements of ASU have been approved as a prescription drug. In other countries, they are available in the supplement section of health food stores (see product sidebar for an example). A typical dose is 300 mg per day. It usually takes between two weeks and two months to take effect. Studies have found no additional benefit with higher doses. The safety of ASU has not been established in children or pregnant or nursing women. Unfortunately for avocado lovers, eating avocado (and soy), even in large amounts, will not provide enough of the unsaponifiables to have a therapeutic effect. Only 1/100th of the oil is the unsaponifiable variety.