



We've talked about apples and pears in previous issues <http://www.fshn.hs.iastate.edu/nutritionclinic/newsletters.htm> — let's move on to pumpkin! It's too bad we only think about this nutritious vegetable around Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas (mainly in the form of pie!) The bright orange color of pumpkin is a dead giveaway that pumpkin is loaded with an important antioxidant, beta-carotene. Beta-carotene is one of the plant carotenoids converted to vitamin A in the body. In the conversion to vitamin A, beta carotene performs many important functions in overall health. Current research indicates that a diet rich in foods containing beta-carotene may reduce the risk of developing certain types of cancer and offers protection against heart disease. Beta-carotene offers protection against other diseases as well as some degenerative aspects of aging. Pumpkin is also a good source of vitamins C, E and K and lots of minerals including potassium, magnesium and iron. Canned pumpkin is easy and reasonably priced. It will keep on your pantry shelf for a long time. Grocery stores now carry it all year long so we should think about working it into our diet on a regular basis!

And don't toss out the seeds! Pumpkin seeds, also called pepitas, are loaded with many minerals, seem to have an anti-inflammatory effect, and may even help protect against prostate cancer and osteoporosis. Limit your portion size as $\frac{1}{4}$ cup has 300 calories and 1.5 grams of fiber.

Selection

For cooking, you want a pumpkin that is heavy for its size. The lighter ones are drier, with a bigger open space in the middle. For the most part, stay away from the large pumpkins when selecting a pumpkin for eating – 2-5 lbs is about right.

Storage

Pumpkins can keep for a long time in a cool (ideally 50-60 degrees) dry place. Put newspapers underneath just in case though! Once the pumpkin is cut open, you need to use it within a couple of days (or freeze it) as it can mold quickly. Cooked, it's fine in the refrigerator for 4-5 days.

Basic Easy Cooking Techniques

For pumpkin puree: You don't need to cut the pumpkin open before you roast it. Just jab it with a knife once or twice to vent the steam, put the whole thing on a baking sheet, and pop it in the oven at 350 F for an hour or so, until you can easily stick a knife into it. Cool, then scoop out the seeds and stringy stuff with a spoon, or pull it out with tongs. It is SO MUCH EASIER than when it is raw!

If you want chunks, you'll have to cut into it raw—puncturing it in several places and then microwaving for a short time on high until it's a bit easier to cut up. Then add chunks to stew or recipe.

For the seeds, let them dry on paper towels, then add a bit of canola oil and season them with spices other than salt (cumin and chili powder or cinnamon and nutmeg) Slowly roast them in a 250 F oven until they smell good – about 45-60 minutes. Stir them every 15 minutes or so.

Check out the attached recipes for new ways to use pumpkin, a highly nutritious vegetable!

Food for Thought!

Have you ever thought about how what you eat affects your brain and your thinking processes? I recently read about specific foods that can boost your memory.

The flavonols in **chocolate and cocoa** are believed to boost your memory by stimulating blood flow in the brain. (But moderation is important!) **Fish that are high in omega-3 fatty acids** such as salmon, tuna, mackerel, and herring may protect your memory by keeping brain cell membranes pliable. Since these fats are also good for your heart and joints, make a point to eat some “fatty fish” at least two times a week! **Deep, dark greens** such as spinach and kale help protect the brain from disease. Greens are nutritional powerhouses Dark green leafy vegetables are, calorie for calorie, perhaps the most concentrated source of nutrition of any food.

They are a rich source of minerals and vitamins and also provide a variety of phytonutrients which protect our cells from damage and our eyes from age-related problems. **Eggs** contain choline which helps the body make a brain chemical, acetylcholine which is a key nutrient for our memory. **Fruits and vegetables** have also been demonstrated to increase your brain power.

I hope many of you are participating in the “Every Step for I-S-You” pedometer challenge. We hope this friendly competition will encourage walking/running and make you aware of your activity level and how to fit more activity into your day and your life. Walking conditions your heart and your lungs. It reduces your risk for some forms of cancer and for osteoporosis. It builds muscle and reduces body fat. It improves your digestion and bowel regularity and lowers your blood pressure. Walking can reduce stress and improve your mood. So happy and healthy walking to all of you!

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Come learn how to reduce your risk for breast and prostate cancers on Wednesday October 17 from noon to 1 PM in 202 Carver Hall. Let me know if you would like to reserve a seat by e-mail or 4-9625. Feel free to bring your lunch along!

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