

Health Benefits Of Winter Squash

Winter squash is one of the members of the Cucurbitaceae family, which is widely eaten as a nutritious vegetable. Unlike the summer squash, it is harvested and eaten in the matured stage. The skin of winter squash is hard, in the form of a tough rind and the seeds within are fully matured. The seeds of winter squash can grow only in warm soil, with no content of frost. Winter squash developed from the wild squash found in the area between Mexico and Guatemala. Earlier, it was pre-dominantly cultivated for its seeds, because the initial varieties had less flesh, which often tasted bitter. Later, the flesh also came to be consumed widely. Gradually, the cultivation of winter squash spread throughout America and then all over the world. Today, China, Italy, Japan, Egypt, Argentina, Romania and Turkey are the leading commercial producers of winter squash. We bring you the health benefits of eating winter squash in the lines below.

Health Benefits Of Eating Winter Squash

- Winter squash is known to have anti-cancer effects. Some studies show that squash juices are capable of preventing cell mutations, which lead to cancer-like changes.
- The vegetable is known for its ability to reduce the symptoms of benign prostatic hypertrophy or BPH in men. This condition causes inflammation of the prostate gland, which creates problem in urinary and sexual function. Winter squash is particularly helpful against the BPH symptoms, when consumed in combination with phytonutrient-containing foods.
- It is also beneficial in fighting against diabetic heart diseases and other complications associated with free radicals often found in long-term diabetes.
- Winter squash has a rich content of beta-carotene, which acts as a powerful antioxidant. It is also known to have anti-inflammatory properties. Beta-carotene also prevents the growth of atherosclerosis.
- It proves highly beneficial for lungs. Winter squash is rich in beta-cryptoxanthin, which considerably lowers the risk of lung cancer. As per the research at Kansas State University, winter squash contains high quantity of vitamin A, which is preventive against the deadly effects of cigarette smoke.
- Oxidized cholesterol can cause blocking of blood vessel, which leads to heart stroke and attack. The beta-carotene present in winter squash is helpful in preventing the oxidation of cholesterol and thus, lowers the risk of heart attacks and stroke.
- Beta-carotene is also beneficial in reducing the risk of colon cancer. It protects colon cells against the harmful effects of cancer-causing chemicals.
- The rich content of beta-carotene in winter squash makes it a healthy vegetable to fight against asthma, rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis, all of which have inflammatory symptoms.
- Winter squash is rich in fiber, which helps in lowering the high cholesterol level and also prevents the cancer-causing chemicals from attacking the cells in the colon.
- It contains folate, which can prevent some birth defects, in case if it is taken by women before and during pregnancy.
- The folate content in winter squash also helps in breaking homocysteine, which has harmful effect on the blood vessels. The increased concentration of homocysteine is connected with increased risk of getting heart attack and stroke. Thus, adequate amount of folate present in winter squash helps in reducing the risks for heart.
- The carotenoids present in winter squash help in regulating the blood sugar level. Its potassium content too helps in lowering blood pressure.
- The vitamin C present in winter squash helps in preventing the growth of conditions like diabetic heart disease and atherosclerosis.

Caution

- Winter squash is not known to have any negative effects. It does not have any allergic effect and also does not contain any measurable quantity of purine or oxalates. It is not even found to contain the pesticide residues.

Cooking Tips

- Before cooking, wash the winter squash properly under cold running water. Cut the squash into half and remove the fibrous substance and seeds present in the cavity.
- You can also remove the inner substances in another way. Cut a small circle around the stem of the squash and then take out this piece from the squash. Scoop out the seeds and the fibrous materials from the cavity.
- Winter squash can be used either in the peeled form or unpeeled form, depending upon the recipe.

Reference website: <http://lifestyle.iloveindia.com/lounge/benefits-of-winter-squash-6208.html>