

What's So Great about Watermelon?

There's a lot to be said about the health benefits of fresh fruits and vegetables that are popular summer fare.

Many studies show that plant foods provide vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that help reduce risk for medical conditions that affect quality of life and shorten lifespans.

Accolades for Watermelon

Watermelon, a picnic staple, is more than 90 percent water, but it packs a big punch. It is sweet and juicy, low in calories and carbohydrates, and high in nutrients and dietary fiber.

Watermelon contains more lycopene, an antioxidant that helps lower blood pressure, cholesterol levels and cancer risk, than any other fruit or vegetable, according to the [National Watermelon Promotion Board](#). Other benefits include:

- **Vitamin A** for healthy eyes and skin and infection-fighting agents
- **Vitamin B6** to produce antibodies and for fetal brain development
- **Vitamin C** for immune system defense against infections and viruses
- **Beta-cryptoxanthin**, which may protect joints from inflammation and arthritis
- **Choline**, a nutrient that supports sleep, muscle movement, learning and memory
- **Citrulline and arginine**, amino acids that improve blood flow and reduce muscle soreness
- **Cucurbitacin E**, or tripterpenoid, which has effects similar to aspirin or ibuprofen
- **Magnesium**, which influences enzyme reactions, including digestion and nerve impulses
- **Potassium**, which maintains water balance in cells and helps prevent muscle cramps



Take advantage of fresh produce health benefits when planning summer menus and be a crowd pleaser with combinations that don't require added ingredients to be flavorful.

Watermelon also contains thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, folate, pantothenic acid, phosphorus, zinc, copper, manganese, selenium and betaine.

Some people temporarily limit their diet to whole or juiced watermelon as a way to detoxify or lose weight. In general, medical professionals advise against a single-fruit cleanse because it does not provide the level of fat and protein needed to maintain cellular health and repair tissues. It may also cause symptoms such as fatigue, headache and diarrhea. A well-balanced diet combined with routine

exercise and not smoking is recommended for lasting health benefits.

When selecting a watermelon, look for one that is firm, heavy and symmetrical without soft spots or bruising. The growing side where it rested on the ground should be a yellow-creamy color, not white. Black dots in a line on the bottom side indicate a sweet melon. Tap on the bottom and listen for a deep, hollow thump; an under-ripe or over-ripe melon will sound dull.



More Summer Favorites...

Berries

Berries make a festive addition to appetizers, salads and desserts, especially around the Fourth of July. Blueberries, blackberries, raspberries and strawberries have a well-deserved reputation for promoting good health because they have high levels of antioxidants, which help neutralize

unstable oxygen molecules (free radicals) that can damage tissues and contribute to the development of disease.

Corn on the Cob

Corn contains dietary fiber and protein, and it is gluten-free. [Research](#) shows there is a correlation between dietary fiber intake and lower overall risk of

premature death, especially from cardiovascular, infectious and respiratory diseases. However, corn is lower in vitamins and minerals when compared to some other fruits and vegetables, and the fiber content is not as high as it is in other complex carbohydrates. Preparation also makes a difference. Added butter or oil contain fat, and salt can cause the body to store water, increasing blood pressure.

Tomatoes

Many people enjoy the taste of freshly picked tomatoes found at the local farmer's market or grown in their backyard garden or pots on the patio. Similar to watermelon, tomatoes are a major dietary source of the antioxidant lycopene. They also contain vitamin C, potassium, folate and vitamin K. Tomatoes are versatile: they come in various shapes, colors and sizes, can be eaten whole or blended, raw or cooked, and made into sauces, soups and dips.

Did You Know?

Oxygen Radical Absorbance Capacity (ORAC) is a measure of the degree and length of time it takes to inhibit oxidation in the body, which has a damaging effect on tissues. Studies suggest that consuming fruits and vegetables with a high ORAC value may slow the aging process in your body and brain. Antioxidants are shown to work best when combined; the presence of fiber and other plant compounds enhance the health benefit.

Single servings of fresh raw or cooked fruits and vegetables supply an average of 600-800 ORAC units. Scientists believe that increasing intake of foods that provide 2,000-5,000 units per day may be needed to increase serum and tissue antioxidant activity sufficiently to improve health outcomes.

Source:
[Berry Health Benefits Network](#)