

Fall Nutrition means Winter Squash!

Winter squash such as butternut, acorn squash, and pumpkins are all in the same family. Winter squash has a tough rind, which allows for storage during the winter months. Storing and preparing squash prolongs the vegetable's quality, ensuring it tastes as sweet and buttery as when you bought it. Squash contains many different nutrients, such as beta-carotene, vitamin C, potassium and fiber.

Health Benefits of Winter Squash

- High in fiber, nutrient dense, the bright orange color of pumpkins, acorn squash, butternut squash, buttercup squash and all the many varieties of winter squash are a dead giveaway that they are loaded with an important antioxidant, beta-carotene. 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.
- Squash is potassium rich. Potassium helps maintain healthy blood pressure and is an important electrolyte for both heart and muscle function.
- Winter squash is an excellent source of vitamin C, which aids in wound healing and is important for gum health. Growth and repair of tissues depends on vitamin C. Cartilage, scar tissue, ligaments and blood vessels depend on vitamin C for development. Vitamin C rich foods also help your body to better absorb iron from foods.

Winter Squash - Nutrition Facts

(1 cup cooked, boiled, drained, without salt)

Approximate Calories 50-60 kcal

Protein 2-3 grams

Carbohydrate 1-14 grams

Dietary Fiber 2-3 grams

Calcium 35-45 mg

Iron 1.2-1.5 mg

Magnesium 20-30 mg

Potassium 500-600 mg

Weight Management Benefits of Winter Squash

- Low calorie, nutrient dense foods that are a source of carbohydrate for working muscles (we are talking vegetables here!) should make up most of your plate. This can help to satisfy your hunger without the higher calorie, starchy foods such as potatoes, rice, and pasta.
- Roasted pumpkin seeds can help take the edge of your appetite while providing iron for endurance, zinc for immune function and a dose of healthy unsaturated fats for muscle energy!

Athletic Performance Benefits of Winter Squash

Carbohydrates and protein are important to working muscles, before, during and after training. Get ready for action with a pre-workout snack of pumpkin nut bars; refuel and rehydrate after training with acorn squash soup.

RECIPES: (for more recipes go to www.recipetips.com)

Roasted Pumpkin Seeds

Don't waste the seeds after making a jack-o-lantern for Halloween. Instead, roast and salt the seeds for a delicious and nutritious snack.

1. Preheat oven to 250°F.
2. Pick through seeds and remove any cut seeds. Remove as much of the stringy fibers as possible.
3. Bring the water and salt to a boil. Add the seeds and boil for 10 minutes. Drain, spread on kitchen towel or paper towel and pat dry.
4. Place the seeds in a bowl and toss with vegetable oil or melted butter.
5. Spread evenly on a large cookie sheet or roasting pan.
6. Place pan in a preheated oven and roast the seeds for 30 to 40 minutes. Stir about every 10 minutes, until crisp and golden brown.
7. Cool the seeds, then shell and eat or pack in air-tight containers or zip closure bags and refrigerate until ready to eat.

Yield 2 cups

Pumpkin Nut Bars

- 1 cup cooked pumpkin puree, fresh or canned
 - 1/2 cup butter or margarine (melted)
 - 2 egg whites, slightly beaten
 - 2 cups oats
 - 1 cup brown sugar, packed
 - 1/2 cup shredded coconut, toasted
 - 1/2 cup wheat germ
 - 1 cup chopped salted peanuts, pecans, or almonds
1. Preheat oven to 350°F. In a large bowl, beat egg whites slightly; add pumpkin and melted butter or margarine beat until smooth.
 2. In another bowl combine oats, brown sugar, coconut, wheat germ, and nuts.
 3. Fold oat mixture into pumpkin mixture to form stiff dough.
 4. Press dough into a lightly greased 15 1/2 x 10 1/2 inch jelly roll pan.
 5. Bake 40 to 45 minutes or until golden brown. While still warm, cut into 2x3 inch bars. Yield about 30 bars. Serve warm or cool completely.

Acorn Squash and Apple Soup

1 medium acorn squash
1 Tbsp. canola oil
1 medium onion, chopped

1 leek (white part only) rinsed well and chopped
1 tart apple (such as Granny Smith), peeled, cored and chopped
3 cups fat-free, reduced sodium chicken broth
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
3 Tbsp. minced fresh mint leaves, as garnish
Milk or additional broth to thin soup (optional)

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Cut acorn squash in half length-wise, remove seeds and pulp. Set on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake until the flesh is tender when pierced, roughly 45 to 90 minutes (depending on size). Remove squash from oven and allow to cool.

While the squash is cooling, in a large, heavy pan heat the canola oil over medium-high heat. Add the onion and leek and sauté for about 4 minutes, until the onion is translucent. Add the apple and cook over medium heat for 1 minute.

Scrape out the squash pulp and combine with the apple mixture. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover and cook for 5 minutes, stirring often. Add the broth to the pan, cover and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for about 30 minutes. Remove the pan from heat and set the soup aside to cool slightly.

In a blender or food processor, puree the soup in batches until smooth. Return soup to pan and heat just before serving. Add milk or additional broth to thin soup, as desired. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Garnish each serving with mint and serve.

Makes 5 servings.

Per serving: 103 calories, 3 g total fat (<1 g saturated fat), 18 g carbohydrate, 3 g protein, 3 g dietary fiber, 330 mg sodium.