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9 Health Benefits of Cucumbers

By Dr. Mercola August 23, 2014

9 Reasons to Eat Cucumbers

1. Protect Your Brain

Cucumbers contain an anti-inflammatory flavonol called fisetin that appears to play an important role in brain health. In addition to improving your memory and protecting your nerve cells from age-related decline, fisetin has been found to prevent progressive memory and learning impairments in mice with Alzheimer's disease.

2. Reduce Your Risk of Cancer

Cucumbers contain polyphenols called lignans (pinosresinol, lariciresinol, and secoisolariciresinol), which may help to lower your risk of breast, uterine, ovarian, and prostate cancers. They also contain phytonutrients called cucurbitacins, which also have anti-cancer properties. According to the George Mateljan Foundation: *"Scientists have already determined that several different signaling pathways (for example, the JAK-STAT and MAPK pathways) required for cancer cell development and survival can be blocked by activity of cucurbitacins."*

3. Fight Inflammation

Cucumbers may help to "cool" the inflammatory response in your body, and animal studies suggest that cucumber extract helps reduce unwanted inflammation, in part by inhibiting the activity of pro-inflammatory enzymes (including cyclo-oxygenase 2, or COX-2).

4. Antioxidant Properties

Cucumbers contain numerous antioxidants, including the well-known vitamin C and beta-carotene. They also contain antioxidant flavonoids, such as quercetin, apigenin, luteolin, and kaempferol,⁶ which provide additional benefits. For instance, quercetin is an antioxidant that many believe prevents histamine release—making quercetin-rich foods "natural antihistamines." Kaempferol, meanwhile, may help fight cancer and lower your risk of chronic diseases including heart disease.

5. Freshen Your Breath

Placing a cucumber slice on the roof of your mouth may help to rid your mouth of odor-causing bacteria. According to the principles of Ayurveda, eating cucumbers may also help to release excess heat in your stomach, which is said to be a primary cause of bad breath.

6. Manage Stress

Cucumbers contain multiple B vitamins, including vitamin B1, vitamin B5, and vitamin B7 (biotin). B vitamins are known to help ease feelings of anxiety and buffer some of the damaging effects of stress.

7. Support Your Digestive Health

Cucumbers are rich in two of the most basic elements needed for healthy digestion: water and fiber. If you struggle with acid reflux, you should know that drinking water can help suppress acute symptoms of acid reflux by temporarily raising stomach pH; it's possible that water-rich cucumbers may have a similar effect. Cucumber skins contain insoluble fiber, which helps add bulk to your stool. This helps food to *move through your digestive tract more quickly* for healthy elimination.

8. Maintain a Healthy Weight

Cucumbers are very low in calories, yet they make a filling snack (one cup of sliced cucumber contains just 16 calories). The soluble fiber in cucumbers dissolves into a gel-like texture in your gut, helping to *slow down* your digestion. This helps you to feel full longer and is one reason why fiber-rich foods may help with weight control.

9. Support Heart Health

Cucumbers contain potassium, which is associated with lower blood pressure levels. A proper balance of potassium both inside and outside your cells is crucial for your body to function properly. As an electrolyte, potassium is a positive charged ion that must maintain a certain concentration (about 30 times higher inside than outside your cells) in order to carry out its functions, which includes interacting with sodium to help control nerve impulse transmission, muscle contraction, and heart function.

Organic Cucumbers Are Worth It

If you're wondering whether you should choose organic cucumbers over conventionally grown varieties, I'd suggest organic. Cucumbers were ranked the 12th most contaminated food and the second in cancer risk due to their pesticide content, according to the Environmental Working Group (EWG).

Further, cucumbers are often waxed after harvest to withstand the long journey to market unscarred and to protect against the many hands that touch it. While the wax is supposed to be food-grade and safe, there are different types used:

- Carnauba wax (from the carnauba palm tree)
- Beeswax
- Shellac (from the lac beetle)
- Petroleum-based waxes

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