

Canned pumpkin is convenient and nutritious

Pumpkin eaters can take heart knowing that canned pumpkin packs a lot of nutrition.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Nutrient Database, canned pumpkin while primarily water, contains just 80 calories. It also offers an entire days' worth of vitamin A, as well as 7 grams of fiber. It is also a very good source of vitamin C, vitamin K, iron and manganese, and is a good source of potassium and many other nutrients.

Canned pumpkin, even canned pumpkin labeled "100 percent pumpkin", can be a mix of pumpkin and other types of winter squash. But most fans of canned pumpkin don't mind. Some even say on foodie discussion boards that they prefer canned pureed pumpkin to homemade.

It's important to note two things. First, don't mistake canned pumpkin puree for canned pumpkin pie filling, even though you may find them next to each other in the baking supplies aisle at the grocery store. You can doctor up the pumpkin puree with your own recipe to use for pumpkin pie, but pumpkin pie filling is already sodden with added sugar, boosting the calorie count to 280 per cup.

Also, look for low- or no-sodium types of canned pumpkin. You'll slash the sodium content in one cup of pumpkin from a whopping 590 milligrams to a more-than-acceptable 10 milligrams.

As for ideas on how to use pumpkin, you can search almost any recipe database to spark your creativity. One such site, often overlooked, is the USDA's "What's Cooking" website at whatscooking.fns.usda.gov. Search for "pumpkin" and the recipes that result include muffins, pancakes, cookies and other treats, as well as dishes such as:

- Pumpkin Soup, which includes a bit of beef roast and maple syrup, black pepper and cinnamon for flavor.
- Pumpkin Peanut Butter Sandwich, which is just what it sounds like. Blend pumpkin with peanut butter before spreading on bread, and add a sliced banana.
- Pumpkin and White Bean Soup, which combines pureed canned white beans and apple juice with pumpkin, onion and spices for a hearty dish.
- Pumpkin Smoothie, which uses chilled canned pumpkin with evaporated low-fat milk, orange juice, banana, light brown sugar, ice cubes and cinnamon.
- Pumpkin Mac and Cheese, which uses pumpkin puree to boost the nutrition in this traditional comfort food.

Here is one of my favorite ways to enjoy pumpkin.

Pumpkin Fluff Dip

1 15 ounce can pumpkin

1 large box instant vanilla pudding

1 teaspoon pumpkin spice

1 16 oz. whipped topping or smaller

In a mixing bowl combine pumpkin and pudding. Mix well then add pumpkin spice an mix. Fold in whipped topping. Refrigerate. Serve with ginger snaps or graham crackers.

Source: Ohio State University Extension