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Have a Pumpkin for Halloween and Health

Whether you care to celebrate Halloween or not, take advantage of the supply of pumpkins in the stores this season to boost your health. If you don't want pumpkin, there are several varieties of squash to choose from. Acorn squash, either green or yellow, can be small enough to serve just one or two people. Butternuts range in size from just over a pound to several pounds. Hubbard and Turk's turbans are much, much larger, enough for a family or two. Patty pans are white, and flat like a pie plate with scallops around the edge. They're great for filling with a savory stuffing. All of these make a smooth mashed squash, but spaghetti squash turn into 'spaghetti' when you scrape them with a fork. You can use these strands just like spaghetti, with sauce, cheese, or however you like. They have less than a quarter of the amount of carbohydrates of spaghetti, and more nutrients.

They all have lots of carotene, which becomes vitamin A. In fact, a quarter of a cup of cooked pumpkin gives you a whole day's worth. For those who watch their blood pressure, pumpkin has practically no sodium. A cup of canned pumpkin has only 12 mg of sodium, but if you boil it yourself you only get 2 mg. Boiling helps reduce the amount because some of it dissolves out into the water.

Half a cup of cooked, mashed pumpkin has only 6 grams of carbohydrate, but a quarter of that is fiber. Fiber slows the absorption of sugars, fills us up, and helps speed food through the gut. Diets high in vegetables, especially a variety of highly colored

vegetables, have been found again and again to protect us against a variety of illnesses from cancer to high blood pressure to hardening of the arteries. Pumpkins and squash fit that prescription.

And because they are slightly sweet and easy to mash, they can be used in dozens of ways. Beside pies, there are breads, cookies, pancakes, soups, stews and casseroles to make with pumpkins and squash. Try one today, another one tomorrow, and a few more next week. Your body will thank you for the treats, no tricks attached.