

## **PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.  
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

### Boo-tiful Pumpkins

Jack-o-Lanterns don't last very long here, in our warm, humid Halloween weather. But that's not a reason to ignore pumpkins! You can paint scary (or happy) faces onto a couple with a black marker and leave them on the windowsill or by the door for a few days. As long as you don't cut them they'll last. Then, get the children to help you transform them into some very good eating. Or, if you'd rather not go to that much work, just buy a couple cans of canned pumpkin and start stirring!

As long as you use plain canned pumpkin, not canned pie filling, you'll be getting all the great nutrition pumpkins offer. Plus you'll control how much extra sugar or fat is added. There are plenty of over-stuffed pumpkin desserts available, including the pumpkin-flavored coffee drinks that really should be called desserts. They have so much sugar, and fat if whole milk or cream is used, and just a pumpkin flavoring, they are more like dessert. Pumpkin-flavored doughnuts are in the same category, lots of fat and sugar, not enough good nutrition. And don't be fooled by pumpkin-shaped chocolate or peanut butter candies. All the calories of candy are still there.

But, the great news is that real pumpkin is really, really good for you! The deep yellow color is a giveaway sign that it's good for your eyes. I doubt you'd be tempted to chew on a stick of raw pumpkin, but even if you did, you wouldn't get as much vitamin A as you will from the canned or cooked pumpkin. Cooking opens up the cells, softens the tissue, and releases the carotene and vitamin A so that we can absorb more of it.

Along with the carotene that we turn into vitamin A, pumpkin also has zeaxanthin. It's one of the phytonutrients that is very active in preventing macular degeneration, a major cause of vision loss in older folks. The vitamin A also helps keep skin healthy.

Pumpkins don't have a lot of carbohydrate, but more than half of what they have is fiber. We don't digest fiber, so there are no calories from it. Instead, fiber helps us feel full and stay regular. Many vegetable fibers also can help manage our cholesterol levels. Fibers slow down how fast and how far our blood sugar rises. Pumpkin does it! Most of the rest of the carbohydrate is complex, not simple sugar. We digest it more slowly. So it doesn't make our blood sugar go up too fast either, as

long as we don't overload the fiber and carbs by adding a lot of sugar.

On top of all this, pumpkins are full of minerals to keep us growing and repairing damage. Magnesium helps control our blood pressure. Manganese, copper and zinc are all necessary for our enzymes and proteins to work. Iron is essential for healthy red blood. Without phosphorus to carry energy around our cells we'd be dead. They all have roles to play in keeping our immune systems up and running too. What more could we ask from a pumpkin?

There is still more! Pumpkin seeds have fiber, and heart-healthy fats, including phytosterols. These are similar to cholesterol, but are just a little different. Instead, they block cholesterol and keep us from absorbing it. You don't want to go overboard with pumpkin seeds because of their calories. And too much fiber can be uncomfortable. But munching on a handful now and then will make your heart and arteries happier.

If you have a whole pumpkin you can bake, steam, boil or microwave it. Serve it in slices, or scrape out the soft tissue and mash it. Season it with salt and pepper or cinnamon and nutmeg. It's great paired with ham or greens. Cubes are wonderful in soups and stews, especially pork stew with some peppers and garlic.

But don't feel bad if you choose to buy a can! There are plenty of good recipes for canned pumpkin too, from soup to ravioli, casseroles to stir-fries. Notice that I'm not mentioning all the sweet and gooey desserts! There are plenty of them around too. This recipe is a variation on corn bread, slightly sweet and still nutritious. Enjoy!

#### Pumpkin Corn Muffins

¾ cup yellow cornmeal	1 cup flour (part whole wheat is good)
1 tsp baking powder	½ tsp baking soda
2 eggs, beaten	1 cup canned pumpkin (not pie filling)
½ cup packed brown sugar	¼ cup vegetable oil
1 tsp cinnamon or pumpkin pie spice	1 cup chopped nuts

Preheat oven to 425° F. Line muffin pan with paper liners. In large bowl combine cornmeal, flour, cinnamon or spice, baking powder and soda. Make a hole in the middle. In small bowl mix eggs, sugar, pumpkin and oil. Stir, then pour into middle of flour. Stir just until the flour is wet, there can still be some lumps. Stir in the nuts. Divide into the muffin cups. Bake 15 to 18 minutes, until dry in center. Makes 12 muffins.

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