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Butternut squash is one of the most common varieties of winter squash. Like other winter squash, it has a hard exterior and firm flesh and is chock full of vitamin A, potassium and fiber. Contrary to the name, winter squash is grown in the summer and harvested in the fall. Due to its thick, tough exterior, it can be stored for several months and eaten during the winter season.

### **Health Benefits**

#### **Lowering and preventing high blood pressure:**

Getting enough potassium in your diet is just as important as lowering your sodium intake when it comes to maintaining a healthy blood pressure. According to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, fewer than 2% of US adults meet the daily 4,700 mg recommendation. Also of note, a high potassium intake is associated with a 20% decreased risk of dying from all causes.

#### **Preventing asthma:**

The risks for developing asthma are lower in people who consume a high amount of beta-carotene, the antioxidant that gives certain fruits and vegetables their bright orange pigments. Look for other orange plant foods like papaya, apricots, broccoli, cantaloupe, pumpkin and carrots to increase your beta-carotene intake.

#### **Lowering cancer risk:**

Beta-carotene has also been shown to have an inverse association with the development of colon cancer in the Japanese population. Among younger men, diets rich in beta-carotene may play a protective role against prostate cancer, according to a study conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health's Department of Nutrition.



### **Managing diabetes:**

Type 1 diabetics who consume high-fiber diets have lower overall blood sugar levels, while type 2 diabetics have improved blood sugar, lipids and insulin levels. One cup of butternut squash provides about 6.6 grams of fiber out of the recommended 21-25 g/day for women and 30-38 g/day for men.

### **Healthy looking skin and hair:**

Butternut squash is also great for your skin because of its extremely high vitamin A content, which is needed for sebum production that keeps hair moisturized. Vitamin A plays an important role in the growth of all bodily tissues, including skin and hair. As an added bonus, one serving of butternut squash provides over 50% of the required vitamin C intake for the day, which is needed for the building and maintenance of collagen that provides structure to skin and hair.

### **Promoting regularity:**

Maintaining a high fiber diet helps to prevent constipation and promote a healthy digestive tract. Recent studies have shown that dietary fiber may even decrease inflammation and improve immune function, consequently decreasing the risk of inflammation-related conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and obesity. Increased fiber intakes have also been shown to lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels and enhance weight loss for obese individuals.

### **Boosting immune function:**

Plant foods like butternut squash that are high in both vitamin C and beta-carotene offer an immunity boost from their powerful combination of nutrients. Some studies have shown that high-fiber foods may also offer improved immune function.