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Mushrooms, though classified as vegetables in the food world, are not technically plants. They belong to the fungi kingdom and although they are not vegetables, mushrooms provide several important nutrients. It's common knowledge that the key to getting enough vitamins and minerals in the diet is to eat a colorful variety of fruits and vegetables - the more color, the better. However, this philosophy tends to leave mushrooms in the dark. In many cases, if a food lacks color, it also in turn lacks necessary nutrients. However, mushrooms - which are commonly white - prove quite the contrary.

### **Health Benefits**

#### **Cancer:**

Mushrooms contain just as high an antioxidant capacity as carrots, tomatoes, green and red peppers, pumpkins, green beans, and zucchini. Selenium is a mineral that is not present in most fruits and vegetables but can be found in mushrooms. It plays a role in liver enzyme function, and helps detoxify some cancer-causing compounds in the body. Additionally, selenium prevents inflammation and also decreases tumor growth rates. The vitamin D in mushrooms has also been shown to inhibit the growth of cancer cells by contributing to the regulation of the cell growth cycle. The folate in mushrooms plays an important role in DNA synthesis and repair, thus preventing the formation of cancer cells from mutations in the DNA.



### **Diabetes:**

Studies have shown that type 1 diabetics who consume high-fiber diets have lower blood glucose levels and type 2 diabetics may have improved blood sugar, lipids and insulin levels. One cup of grilled portabella mushrooms and one cup of stir-fried shiitake mushrooms both provide about 3 grams of fiber. The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends 21-25 g/day for women and 30-38 g/day for men.

### **Heart health:**

The fiber, potassium and vitamin C content in mushrooms all contribute to cardiovascular health. Potassium and sodium work together in the body to help regulate blood pressure. Consuming mushrooms, which are high in potassium and low in sodium helps to lower blood pressure and decrease the risk of high blood pressure and cardiovascular diseases. Additionally, an intake of 3 grams of beta-glucans per day can lower blood cholesterol levels by 5%.

### **Immunity:**

Selenium has also been found to improve immune response to infection by stimulating production of killer T-cells. The beta-glucan fibers found in the cell walls of mushrooms stimulate the immune system to fight cancer cells and prevent tumors from forming.

### **Weight management and satiety:**

Dietary fiber plays an important role in weight management by functioning as a "bulking agent" in the digestive system. Mushrooms contain two types of dietary fibers in their cell walls: beta-glucans and chitin which increase satiety and reduce appetite, making you feel fuller longer and thereby lowering your overall calorie intake.