- Fruit

Why a Kiwi may be the perfect snack

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Apples and bananas may be some of the world's favourite fruits. But nutrition experts say that kiwis deserve a spot in your shopping cart.



These brown, fuzzy fruits with green, yellow or even red flesh are packed with beneficial nutrients such as fiber and vitamin C. And on TikTok, wellness influencers rave about their digestive and sleep-inducing benefits.

"Kiwis are having a moment right now and for good reason," said Judy Simon, a clinical dietitian at the University of Washington Medical Center in Seattle.

Here's why their spotlight is so well-deserved, and how incorporating kiwis into your diet may influence your health.

LOADED WITH NUTRIENTS

Kiwis contain an impressive array of nutrients. A medium-sized fruit offers a little more than 2g of fibre at just 48 calories. The skin is especially fibre-rich.

Fibre slows digestion, helping to prevent blood sugar spikes, said Amy Ellis, a dietitian and associate professor of nutrition at the University of Alabama. Over time, such spikes can increase the risk for Type 2 diabetes.

Fiber also binds to "bad" cholesterol, or LDL, in the intestine, helping to remove it from your body, Simon said. Excess LDL can lead to a buildup of plaque in your arteries, increasing your risk for heart attacks and strokes.

When it comes to vitamin C, citrus fruit "gets all the attention", said Danielle Davis, a dietitian who specialises in gut health at NYC Health + Hospitals/ Bellevue. But one kiwi contains 56mg of the nutrient. This is more than you'd get from one clementine or half a grapefruit — and 62% of the daily vitamin C recommendation for men and 75% of the daily recommendation for women.

Vitamin C, which your body can't make on its own, supports your immune system and plays an important role in wound healing. It also helps your body absorb iron from foods such as leafy green vegetables, Davis said.

One kiwi contains about 150mg of potassium — a "nice amount", Simon said. (A banana has about 400mg.)

Potassium helps prevent high blood pressure by offsetting the effects of too much sodium, Davis said. Kiwis also have beneficial unsaturated fats, which can help you absorb some fat-soluble vitamins they contain, such as vitamins A and E, Simon said.

They're "nutrient dense, satiating and delicious", Simon added, making them the perfect snack.

CAN HELP YOU STAY REGULAR

When Dr Shanti Eswaran's patients ask her for strategies for constipation relief that don't involve taking supplements or medication, she often recommends eating kiwis. Prunes are also helpful, said Eswaran, who is a gastroenterologist at Michigan Medicine. But you would need to eat four prunes to get as much fiber as you would from one kiwi. And in her experience, people tend to enjoy kiwis more, she said.

In one industry-funded randomised controlled trial of about 200 people from 2023, participants who ate two green kiwis each day had more bowel movements per week than they did before the study.

Kiwis contain both soluble and insoluble fibre, which help address constipation, Ellis said. Soluble fibre forms a viscous gel in your intestines and pulls water into your stool, making it softer and easier to pass.

“For healthy stool, you want it to be kind of fluffy,” Davis said. The soluble fibre can help you achieve that consistency.

Insoluble fibre, on the other hand, doesn’t break down in your intestines, but bulks up your stool, helping to keep it moving, Davis said.

Although other high-fibre fruits and vegetables offer similar constipation-relieving benefits, kiwis (particularly the green ones) are one of a select few fruits that contain an enzyme called actinidin. Some animal studies suggest that this enzyme can make it easier to digest protein, but it’s not clear if these findings apply to humans.

MIGHT HELP WITH SLEEP

Some on social media say that eating kiwis can help you sleep better, pointing to a small, limited study from 2023 to support this claim. In the study, elite athletes who consumed two kiwis one hour before bed for four weeks reported that their sleep quality improved.

Kiwis contain trace amounts of melatonin, a hormone that makes you feel drowsy at night. They also contain a bit of serotonin, a chemical the brain uses to make melatonin. But there’s no evidence that kiwis contain enough of either melatonin or serotonin to affect sleep, Simon said.

“It’s an interesting connection,” she said. “But the studies just aren’t strong.”

Those who say that kiwis help them sleep may be feeling the effect of a healthy food swap, Simon said. If someone who usually eats cookies at night substitutes them with two kiwis, their sleep may improve. Eating foods with added sugars and refined carbohydrates right before bed can impair your sleep.

HOW TO ENJOY KIWIS

Simon recommended blending kiwis into a breakfast smoothie or adding them to a fruit salad or a bowl of Greek yoghurt.

You can also eat kiwis straight, skin included, as Davis does. If you want to try the skin but are turned off by its texture, she recommended starting with the yellow varieties. These tend to have less fuzz.