

PRUNES AS HEALTH BOOSTERS: A REVIEW

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Summary

Prunes are fruits that are dried plums. They are very much liked by many people. It is eaten for its health benefits. The number of health benefits related to prunes is increasing each day. As a fruit, it has many benefits as scientists are telling the people to eat fruits and vegetables more than any other kind of foods. This is because fruits contain many essential foods that help to get the body's defense mechanism to be ready to fight against all kinds of diseases. In the present review we have focused on selection and storage, tips for preparing prunes, nutritional values of prunes, content of prunes, the various health benefits of prunes and side effects of prunes.

Keywords: Agen, Health, Plums, Prunes

Introduction

Prunes are nutritious fruits that are extremely fun to eat since they have a sweet, deep taste and a sticky, chewy texture. Prunes are actually dried plums, more specifically the dried version of European plums, including the Agen variety. Unfortunately for the delicious and quite beneficial prune, its name has acquired a somewhat negative connotation, being associated with wrinkles, old age and sluggish gastrointestinal tracts. As our Health Benefits section shows, nothing could be further from the truth.

To give prunes some PR that may help overcome this stigma and to promote prunes to their rightful place in the American diet, they have been informally christened with another name, a name that reflects their heritage the "dried plum." The scientific name for plums and prunes is *Prunus domestica*.¹



History

The process of drying plums to make prunes is thought to have originated thousands of years ago in an area near the Caspian Sea, the same region where the prune-producing European plums originated. They spread throughout Europe with the migration of different cultures and civilizations. The process of drying plums to produce prunes took hold in California, now the leading producer of prunes worldwide, in the mid-19th century when Louis Pellier planted grafted plum tree cuttings brought back with him from his native France².

SELECTION AND STORAGE^{3,4}

Prunes are sold either with their pits or already pitted. The form you choose should depend upon your personal preference and recipe needs. Ideally, you should purchase prunes that are sold in transparent containers so that you can evaluate them for quality. They should be plump, shiny, relatively soft and free of mold. If the packages are opaque, ensure that they are tightly sealed so that the prunes will not have lost any moisture. As with any other dried fruit, try to purchase prunes that are not processed with food preservatives such as sulfites. Prunes should be stored in an airtight container in a cool, dry and dark place where they will keep for several months. Storing them in the refrigerator will extend their freshness, allowing them to keep for about six months. Regardless of where you store them, make sure that when you open the container, you reseal it tightly to prevent the prunes from losing moisture.

TIPS FOR PREPARING PRUNES

If you have prunes that are extremely dry, soaking them in hot water for a few minutes will help to refresh them. If you are planning on cooking the prunes, soaking them in water or juice beforehand will reduce the cooking time ⁵.

NUTRITIONAL VALUES OF PURNES ^{6,7}

Preparation	Portion	Carbs (g)	Fiber (g)	Fat (g)	Energy (kj)
Dried Prunes	5 (38g)	16.5	3	0	295
Stewed Prunes (with sugar)	150g	29.5	3	0	500
Stewed Prunes (without sugar)	150g	18.5	3.5	0	330
Prune Juice	250ml	44.5	2.5	0	760

Table 1: Nutritional Values of Prunes

CONTENT OF PRUNES

Every 100 grams of prunes offers a storehouse of nutrients. Specifically, prunes provide a whopping 810 mg of potassium and 7 mg of iron, both essential components for healthy blood. 1890 I.U. of Vitamin A and 3 mg of Vitamin C will help to maintain healthy skin, hair and nails. Measuring in with a noteworthy 78 g of carbohydrates, prunes are sure to give you a long-lasting and healthy energy boost. All this and more, packaged into a reasonable 268 calories, makes prunes a low-calorie and low-fat addition to a healthy diet ⁸.

THE VARIOUS HEALTH BENEFITS OF PRUNES

1. Antioxidants

The prunes that are died into plums have antioxidants that are six times more than in the fresh state. The antioxidants present in this fruit help to prevent cancer. Prunes should be in the diet of every person. This is because increased intake of prunes in the diet will help to prevent cancer. The presence of beta-carotene in prunes also helps to prevent cancer. So prunes can be said to prevent cancer in more than one way ⁹.

2. Constipation

Prunes can be eaten to prevent constipation. This is because there is a large amount of fiber present in prunes. Along with the fiber, prunes also have sorbitol that is a stool loosening substance. This helps to prevent constipation ¹⁰.

3. Anemia

Prunes help to prevent anemia because of the increased iron content present. So this health benefit of prunes can be used when a person needs to reduce the risk of anemia ¹¹.

4. Ageing

Prunes help to maintain and even increase the brains capacity and the vitality of a person. Thus it can be said of prunes that they help in curbing the ageing process. It helps to maintain the brain function. This is an important reason that it is used to prevent Alzheimer's disease. People who are getting old should eat prunes to keep their memory intact for a longer period of time ¹².

5. Diabetes

Prunes help in preventing a person from getting diabetes. The exact mechanism of this has not been identified, but it has been seen that people who have been on a regular diet of prunes have had a lesser incidence of diabetes than those who have not been on a regular diet of prunes.

6. Cholesterol and cardio vascular diseases

Regular intake of prunes has been identified to reduce the levels of cholesterol in people. This effect is so great that people who are on a regular diet of prunes have lesser risk of cardio vascular disease. In this age where the lifestyles have changed and more people are identified with high cholesterol levels that are leading to increased cardio vascular problems, the effect of prunes in reducing these risks are a great health benefit that has to be utilized fully ¹³.

7. Normalizing Blood Sugar Levels and Helping with Weight Loss

Prunes' soluble fiber helps normalize blood sugar levels by slowing the rate at which food leaves the stomach and by delaying the absorption of *glucose* (the form in which sugar is transported in the blood) following a meal. Soluble fiber also increases insulin sensitivity and can therefore play a helpful role in the prevention and treatment of type 2 diabetes. And, prunes' soluble fiber promotes a sense of satisfied fullness after a meal by slowing the rate at which food leaves the stomach, so prunes can also help prevent overeating and weight gain ¹⁴.

8. Weight Loss

No studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of prunes or prune juice for weight loss. However, because prunes can help make you feel full for a long time, it stands to reason that they may cut your urge to eat something. Losing weight is best accomplished by following a

healthy diet, containing natural and organic foods, such as fruits and vegetables, and exercising. Drinking a glass of prune juice can also help normalize blood sugar levels ¹⁵.

9. Cancer Prevention

According to the American Cancer Society, foods high in fiber and vitamin A may offer some protection against cancers of the gastrointestinal and respiratory tracts as well as cancers induced by chemicals. Researchers have found that the phytonutrients in prunes inhibited in vitro breast cancer growth without adversely affecting normal cell growth ¹⁶.

10. Osteoporosis Prevention

Several studies have demonstrated that prunes, which contain high amounts of polyphenols, can restore bone mass and structure. Prunes are a good source of boron, which is believed to play a role in prevention of osteoporosis ¹⁷.

11. Anti-inflammatory

Prunes can help protect against diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis and asthma, as well as relieving some of the symptoms of these conditions.

12. Good for eye health

The high vitamin A content in prunes makes them good for overall eye health, and the presence of beta-carotene protects against the formation of cataracts ¹⁸.

SIDE EFFECTS OF PRUNES ¹⁹

- **Bloating and Gas**

Eating large amounts of prunes may lead to unpleasant gastrointestinal effects, such as bloating and gas. Eating smaller amounts of prunes spread throughout the day may help to prevent excess flatulence.

- **Diarrhea**

The potent laxative properties of prunes can potentially work too well. Eating prunes every day for long periods of time can lead to chronic diarrhea.

- **Laxative Dependency**

Because prunes contain an ingredient that is an irritant laxative, similar to stimulant laxatives such as Ex-Lax, long-term use of prunes can cause your digestive system to become dependent on prunes for normal bowel movements, warns the University of New Hampshire Health Services. If your digestive tract becomes dependent on laxatives, when you stop taking them you may experience temporary withdrawal symptoms, including constipation, weight gain and fluid retention.

CAUTION²⁰

Strictly avoid the intake of prunes in case of untreated or existing kidney and gall bladder problems. The fruit contains certain amount of oxalates, which when too concentrated in body fluids can become crystallizes and cause health problems. Studies have indicated that oxalates interfere with the absorption of calcium from the body.

Conclusion

Prunes are actually dried plums, more specifically the dried version of European plums, including the Agen variety. They spread throughout Europe with the migration of different cultures and civilizations. The number of health benefits in cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases related to prunes is increasing each day. Hence it is becoming the popular food all over the world.

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