

Cherimoya (*Annona cherimola*)



Cherimoya (*Annona cherimola*) is a green, cone-shaped fruit with leathery skin and creamy, sweet flesh.

Thought to have originated in the Andes mountains of South America, it's grown in tropical areas with high altitudes .

Due to its creamy texture, cherimoya is also known as custard apple. It's often eaten with a spoon and served chilled like custard. Cherimoya has a sweet taste similar to other tropical fruits, such as banana and pineapple .

Rich in fiber, vitamins, and minerals, this unique fruit may support immunity, reduce inflammation, and promote eye and heart health .

However, certain parts of cherimoya contain toxins that may damage your nervous system if consumed in high amounts .

Here are 8 surprising benefits of cherimoya.

1. High in antioxidants

Cherimoya is loaded with antioxidants, which fight free radicals in your body. High levels of free radicals can cause oxidative stress, which is associated with many chronic illnesses, including cancer and heart disease .

Certain compounds in cherimoya — including kaurenoic acid, flavonoids, carotenoids, and vitamin C — have powerful antioxidant effects .

One test-tube study found that both the peel and pulp are excellent sources of antioxidants — with compounds in the peel especially effective at preventing oxidative damage.

However, note that you should not eat the peel of cherimoya due to health concerns. This is explained in more detail below.

Cherimoya's carotenoid antioxidants, such as lutein, may be particularly powerful. Research shows that foods rich in

carotenoids may boost eye health and reduce your risk for heart disease and certain cancers.



2. May boost your mood

Cherimoya is an excellent source of vitamin B6 (pyridoxine). In fact, 1 cup (160 grams) of the fruit contains 24% of the Reference Daily Intake (RDI).

Vitamin B6 plays an important role in the creation of neurotransmitters, including serotonin and dopamine, which help regulate your mood .

Inadequate levels of this vitamin may contribute to mood disorders.

In fact, low blood levels of vitamin B6 are linked to depression, especially in older adults. One study in older adults found that vitamin B6 deficiency doubled one's chances of depression .

By boosting levels of this important vitamin, eating foods like cherimoya may help reduce your risk of depression related to vitamin B6 deficiency.

3. May benefit eye health

Cherimoya is rich in the carotenoid antioxidant lutein, one of the main antioxidants in your eyes that maintain healthy vision by fighting free radicals .

Several studies associate high lutein intake with good eye health and a lower risk of age-related macular degeneration (AMD), a condition marked by eye damage and vision loss .

Lutein may also protect against other eye issues — including cataracts, which is a clouding of the eye that causes poor eyesight and vision loss .

A review of 8 studies found that individuals with the highest blood levels of lutein had a 27% lower risk for developing cataracts, compared with those with the lowest levels .

Therefore, consuming lutein-rich foods — such as cherimoya — may support eye health and reduce the risk of conditions like AMD and cataracts.

4. May prevent high blood pressure

Cherimoya is high in nutrients that help regulate blood pressure, such as potassium and magnesium.

Notably, 1 cup (160 grams) of the fruit boasts 10% of the RDI for potassium and over 6% of the RDI for magnesium

Both potassium and magnesium promote the dilation of blood vessels, which in turn helps lower blood pressure. High blood pressure may increase your risk for heart disease and stroke .

One review noted that consuming the DV for potassium — 4,700 mg per day — can reduce systolic and diastolic blood pressure by around 8 and 4 mm Hg, respectively .

Another review found an inverse relationship between magnesium intake and risk of high blood pressure, when comparing people with the highest magnesium intake to those with the lowest intake. Each additional 100 mg per day intake of magnesium was associated with a 5% lower risk of high blood pressure .

5. May promote good digestion

One cup (160 grams) of cherimoya offers almost 5 grams of dietary fiber, which is over 17% of the RDI .

Because fiber cannot be digested or absorbed, it adds bulk to stool and helps move it through your intestines .

In addition, soluble fibers — like those found in cherimoya — can feed the good bacteria in your gut, as well as undergo fermentation to produce short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs). These acids include butyrate, acetate, and propionate .

SCFAs are energy sources for your body and may protect against inflammatory conditions that affect your digestive tract, such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis .

By supporting healthy bowel movements and nourishing gut bacteria, cherimoya and other fiber-rich foods can promote optimal digestive health.

6. May have anticancer properties

Some of the compounds in cherimoya may help fight cancer.

Cherimoya contains flavonoids including catechin, epicatechin, and epigallocatechin, which have been shown to stop the growth of cancer cells in test-tube studies .

One study found that treating bladder cancer cells with epicatechin led to significantly less cell growth and replication, compared with cells that did not receive this flavonoid .

Another test-tube study observed that some catechins — including those in cherimoya — stopped up to 100% of breast cancer cell growth.

What's more, population studies suggest that individuals who consume diets rich in flavonoids have a lower risk for developing certain cancers — such as those of the stomach and colon — than people whose diets are low in these compounds .

However, more human studies are needed to fully understand how the compound found in cherimoya and other fruits affect cancer.

7. May fight inflammation

Chronic inflammation is linked to increased risk of many illnesses, including heart disease and cancer .

Notably, cherimoya provides several anti-inflammatory compounds, including kaurenoic acid.

This acid has strong anti-inflammatory effects and has been shown to decrease certain inflammatory proteins in animal studies .

In addition, cherimoya boasts catechin and epicatechin, flavonoid antioxidants found to have powerful anti-inflammatory effects in test-tube and animal studies .

One study observed that mice fed an epicatechin-enriched diet had reduced blood levels of the inflammatory marker C-reactive protein (CRP), compared with a control group .

High levels of CRP are associated with atherosclerosis, a hardening and narrowing of the arteries that significantly increases your risk for heart disease.

8. May support immunity

Like other tropical fruits, cherimoya is loaded with vitamin C, a nutrient that supports immunity by fighting infections and disease .

Vitamin C deficiency is linked to impaired immunity and an increased risk of infections.

Human studies further reveal that vitamin C may help decrease the duration of the common cold. However, research is mixed and has mostly focused on supplements rather than dietary vitamin C.

Consuming cherimoya and other foods rich in this vitamin is an easy way to ensure adequate immune health.

Side effects of cherimoya

Even though cherimoya offers impressive health benefits, it contains small amounts of toxic compounds.

Cherimoya and other fruits in the *Annona* species contain annonacin, a toxin that can affect your brain and nervous system .

In fact, observational studies in tropical areas link high consumption of *Annona* fruits to an increased risk of a specific type of Parkinson's disease that does not respond to common medications .

All parts of the cherimoya plant may contain annonacin, but it's most concentrated in the seeds and skin .

To enjoy cherimoya and limit your exposure to annonacin, remove and discard the seeds and skin before eating.

If you are especially concerned about annonacin or have Parkinson's disease or another nervous system condition, it may be best to avoid cherimoya.

