

Dragon fruit

Pitaya

Pitaya or pitahaya



Dragon fruit, also known as pitahaya or strawberry pear, is a tropical fruit known for its vibrant red skin and sweet, seed-speckled pulp.

Its unique look and acclaimed superfood powers have made it popular among foodies and the health-conscious.

Luckily, you don't have to live in the tropics to enjoy the many benefits of dragon fruit. In fact, you can find it fresh or frozen in supermarkets worldwide.

Here are 7 health benefits of dragon fruit, all based on evidence.

1. High in Nutrients

Dragon fruit is low in calories but packed with essential vitamins and minerals. It also contains a substantial amount of dietary fiber.

Here's a rundown of the main nutrients in a one-cup serving (227 grams) :

- **Calories:** 136
- **Protein:** 3 grams
- **Fat:** 0 grams
- **Carbohydrates:** 29 grams
- **Fiber:** 7 grams
- **Iron:** 8% of the RDI
- **Magnesium:** 18% of the RDI
- **Vitamin C:** 9% of the RDI
- **Vitamin E:** 4% of the RDI

Beyond essential nutrients, dragon fruit supplies beneficial plant compounds like polyphenols, carotenoids and betacyanins .

2. May Help Fight Chronic Disease

Free radicals are unstable molecules that cause cell damage, which may lead to inflammation and disease.

One way to combat this is by eating antioxidant-rich foods like dragon fruit.

Antioxidants work by neutralizing free radicals, thus preventing cell damage and inflammation.

Studies suggest that diets high in antioxidants may help prevent chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and arthritis.

Dragon fruit contains several types of potent antioxidants, including :



- **Vitamin C:** Observational studies have found correlations between vitamin C intake and cancer risk. For example, a study in 120,852 people associated higher intakes of vitamin C with lower rates of head and neck cancer .
- **Betalains:** Test-tube studies indicate betalains can combat oxidative stress and may have the ability to suppress cancer cells.
- **Carotenoids:** Beta-carotene and lycopene are the plant pigments that give dragon fruit its vibrant color. Diets rich in carotenoids have been linked to a reduced risk of cancer and heart disease.

Importantly, antioxidants work best when eaten naturally in food, rather than in pill form or as a supplement. In fact, antioxidant supplements may have harmful effects, and taking them without medical supervision is not recommended.

On the other hand, dragon fruit is highly recommended.

3. Loaded With Fiber

Dietary fibers are nondigestible carbohydrates that boast an extensive list of potential health benefits.

Health authorities recommend 25 grams of fiber per day for women and 38 grams for men. Like antioxidants, fiber supplements do not have the same health benefits as fiber from foods .

With 7 grams per one-cup serving, dragon fruit is an excellent whole-food source.

Although fiber is probably most well known for its role in digestion, research has suggested it may also play a role in protecting against heart disease, managing type 2 diabetes and maintaining a healthy body weight .



Although more research is needed, some observational studies suggest that diets high in fiber may protect against colon cancer .

While no studies have linked dragon fruit to any of these conditions, its high-fiber content can help you meet your recommended daily values.

However, it's important to note that high-fiber diets can have drawbacks, especially if you're accustomed to a low-fiber diet. To avoid stomach discomfort, increase your intake of dietary fiber gradually and drink plenty of fluids.

4. Promotes a Healthy Gut

Your gut is home to some 100 trillion diverse microorganisms, including more than 400 species of bacteria .

Many researchers believe this community of microorganisms may impact your health. Both human and animal studies have associated imbalances in your gut to conditions like asthma and heart disease .

Given that dragon fruit contains prebiotics, it can potentially improve the balance of good bacteria in your gut .

Prebiotics are a specific type of fiber that promotes the growth of healthy bacteria in your gut.

Like all fibers, your gut cannot break them down. However, the bacteria in your gut can digest them. They use the fiber as fuel for growth, and you reap the benefits.

In particular, dragon fruit mainly promotes the growth of two families of healthy bacteria: lactic acid bacteria and bifidobacteria .

Regularly consuming prebiotics may reduce the risk of infection in your digestive tract and diarrhea. This is because prebiotics promote the growth of good bacteria, which researchers believe may outcompete the bad .

For example, a study in travelers showed that those who consumed prebiotics before and during travel experienced fewer and less severe episodes of traveler's diarrhea .Some studies also suggest prebiotics may ease symptoms of inflammatory bowel disease and colon cancer. Unfortunately, these findings are inconsistent .

While much of the research on prebiotics is favorable, the research on the prebiotic activity of dragon fruit is limited to test-tube studies. More studies are needed to determine its true effect on the human gut.

5. Strengthens Your Immune System

Your body's ability to fight infection is determined by several different factors, including the quality of your diet.

The vitamin C and carotenoids in dragon fruit may boost your immune system and prevent infection by protecting your white blood cells from damage.

The white blood cells in your immune system attack and destroy harmful substances. However, they are extremely sensitive to damage by free radicals.

As potent antioxidants, vitamin C and carotenoids can neutralize free radicals and defend your white blood cells against harm.

6. May Boost Low Iron Levels

Dragon fruit is one of the few fresh fruits that contain iron.

Iron plays a crucial role in transporting oxygen throughout your body. It also plays an important role in breaking down food into energy .

Unfortunately, many people do not get enough iron. In fact, it has been estimated that 30% of the world's population is deficient in iron, making it the most common nutrient deficiency worldwide .

To combat low iron levels, it's important to consume a variety of iron-rich foods. Rich sources of iron include meats, fish, legumes, nuts and cereals.

Dragon fruit may be another great option, as one serving contains 8% of your recommended daily intake (RDI). It also contains vitamin C, which helps your body absorb iron

7. Good Source of Magnesium

Dragon fruit offers more magnesium than most fruits, with 18% of your RDI in just one cup.

On average, your body contains 24g of magnesium, or roughly one ounce.

Despite this seemingly small amount, the mineral is present in every one of your cells and takes part in over 600 important chemical reactions within your body .

For example, it takes part in reactions needed for the breakdown of food into energy, muscle contraction, bone formation and even the creation of DNA .

More studies are needed, but some indicate that higher intakes of magnesium may reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke .

Studies also show that diets adequate in magnesium support bone health.

How to Eat Dragon Fruit

While dragon fruit's thick, leathery skin can be intimidating, eating this fruit is quite simple.

The trick is finding one that is perfectly ripe.

An unripe dragon fruit will be green. Look for one that is bright red. Some spots are normal, but too many bruise-like splotches can indicate that it's

overripe. Like avocado and kiwi, a ripe dragon fruit should be soft but not mushy.

Here's how to eat a fresh dragon fruit:

1. Using a sharp knife, cut it in half lengthwise.
2. Scoop out the fruit with a spoon, or cut it into cubes by cutting vertical and horizontal lines into the pulp without cutting into the peel. Push on the back of the skin to expose the cubes and remove them with a spoon or your fingers.
3. To enjoy, add it to salads, smoothies and yogurt, or simply snack on it by itself.

You can also find dragon fruit in the frozen section of some grocery stores, pre-peeled and cut into cubes. This is a convenient option for a tasty snack that packs a nutrient-dense punch.

The Bottom Line

Dragon fruit is a delicious tropical fruit that's definitely worth trying.

It tastes amazing, offers a pop of color to your plate and supplies essential nutrients, prebiotic fibers and beneficial plant compounds — all in a low-calorie serving.

If you're looking for a way to add some variety to your fruit intake, dragon fruit is a delicious option with many potential health benefits.