

The Green Marvel: Exploring the Nutritional and Health Benefits of Avocado

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SUMMARY

Avocado's high nutritional composition and its positive impact on overall health making it more popular among the fruits. With its abundance of monounsaturated fats, vitamins and minerals, the avocado stands out as a versatile and nutrient-dense addition to one's diet. The potential benefits for heart health, weight management and nutrient absorption make it a valuable food choice. Furthermore, the avocado's anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties contribute to its role in supporting overall well-being. Embracing the green marvel in our meals can be a delicious and healthful decision for a more balanced and nourishing lifestyle.

INTRODUCTION

The avocado (*Persea americana* Mill), commonly known as Butter Fruit or The Green Marvel is an important commodity in international fruit trade due to its high nutritional value and greater health benefits. Avocado originated in Central America but in India, it is reported to have been introduced from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in recent past. There are three distinct races of avocado (Mexican, Guatemalan and West Indian), that vary in their shape, size and nutritional content. These are sometimes categorized at subtropical, semi-tropical and tropical. In India, avocado is mainly grown as a backyard crop in states of Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and coastal Maharashtra. Systematic cultivation of avocado fruits in India was started recently after knowing the importance of this crop. There were no specific varieties for cultivation however, recently ICAR- Indian Institute of Horticultural Research, Bengaluru, has developed two new avocado varieties viz. Arka supreme and Arka Coorg Ravi for large scale cultivation in India.

Why Avocado Gaining Importance

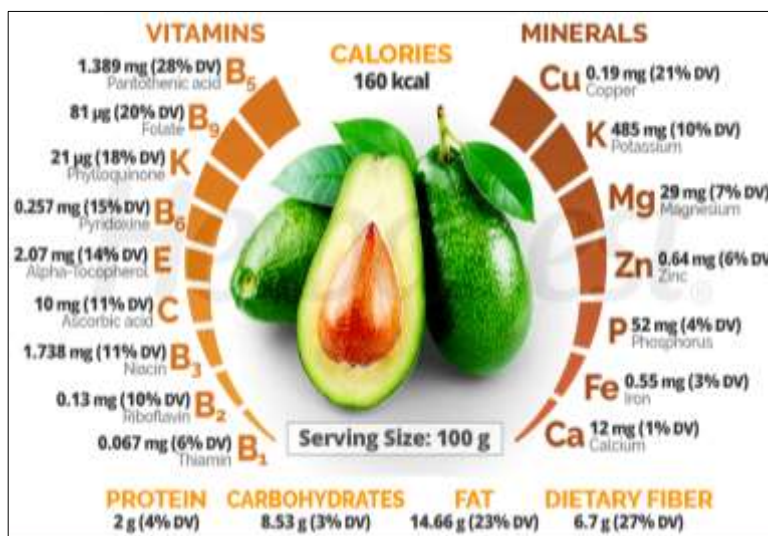
Avocado has gaining importance for several reasons, making it a popular and sought after fruit in many parts of the world. Its production, particularly in India increasing in rapid manner due following reasons.

- 1. Nutraceutical value:** Avocados fruits are loaded with nutrients and rich in healthy monounsaturated fats, which are beneficial for heart health. They also contain various vitamins and minerals. The fruit is often praised for its nutritional profile and its potential health benefits.
- 2. Versatility:** Avocados are versatile and can be incorporated into a wide variety of dishes. They are commonly used in salads, sandwiches, wraps, smoothies and as a topping or ingredient in many other dishes. The creamy texture and mild flavor make them a popular choice for both savory and sweet recipes.
- 3. Healthy fats:** Avocados are a good source of monounsaturated fats, which are considered heart healthy fats. These fats can help reduce bad cholesterol levels and lower the risk of heart disease.
- 4. Culinary trends:** Avocado toast, a simple dish featuring mashed avocado on toast, became a trendy and instagrammable food item, helping to boost the fruits popularity among younger generations.
- 5. Superfood status:** Avocados are often referred to as a "superfood" due to their nutrient content and potential health benefits. The superfood status has contributed to their popularity and increased consumption.
- 6. Global Availability:** Avocados are now grown in various parts of the world, leading to increased availability throughout the year. This global production has made avocados more accessible to consumers worldwide.
- 7. Marketing and Popularity:** Marketing efforts and increased media coverage have contributed to the popularity of avocados. The fruit is often featured in food blogs, social media and cooking shows, further fueling its demand.

Nutritional Composition of Avocado Fruit

Nutritionally avocado is very rich. It has 20 to 30 percent fat. Predominant fatty acids present in avocado fruit are oleic acid, linoleic acid, lenolenic acid and palmatic acid and major share is from monounsaturated fatty acids (PUFA-71%) which is known as good fat. It is also loaded with vitamins such as vitamin B, vitamin C, vitamin E and vitamin K and minerals like calcium, magnesium, potassium and sodium.

Avocado is one of the best fruit which has a lot of antioxidants due to presence of phenolic compounds in large quantities. This fruit also has other important nutrients like carbohydrates and proteins which are very important for humans. However, ripe avocados are very low in sugars and acids.



Avocado fruit nutritional composition (Source: USDA)

Health Benefits of Avocado

- Heart health:** Avocados are known for their heart healthy monounsaturated fats, which may help lower bad cholesterol levels (LDL cholesterol) while increasing good cholesterol levels (HDL cholesterol). The potassium content in avocados can also contribute to maintaining healthy blood pressure levels.
- Antioxidant properties:** Avocados contain antioxidants, including carotenoids (such as lutein and zeaxanthin) and vitamin E. These antioxidants play a role in neutralizing free radicals, which can help protect cells from oxidative damage.
- Eye health:** Lutein and zeaxanthin present in avocados are carotenoids that are beneficial for maintaining eye health. They may help reduce the risk of age related macular degeneration and cataracts.
- Anti-inflammatory effects:** The monounsaturated fats in avocados along with other compounds may have anti-inflammatory effects. Chronic inflammation is associated with various health conditions, so consuming anti-inflammatory foods can be beneficial.
- Regulation of blood sugar:** The fibre content in avocados may help regulate blood sugar levels by slowing the digestion and absorption of carbohydrates.
- Nutrient absorption:** Some nutrients, such as vitamins A, D, E, and K, are fat-soluble, meaning they are better absorbed in the presence of dietary fats. The healthy fats in avocados can aid in the absorption of these important nutrients.
- Bone health:** Avocados contain vitamin K, which is essential for bone health. Vitamin K is involved in the regulation of calcium in bones and may contribute to maintaining bone density.
- Natural detoxification:** Avocado fruit is known for its fibre content also. Adequate fibre promotes regular bowel movements, which are crucial for the excretion of toxins through the bile and stool. Studies have shown that dietary fibre also promotes good gut health and microbial diversity. This helps the body maintain a healthy bacterial balance. This can reduce the inflammation and aggravation of the digestive tract.
- Antimicrobial action:** Avocados and avocado oil contain substances that have antimicrobial properties. Research shows that avocado seed extracts can help defend the body against both *Streptococcus agalactiae* and *staphylococcus aureus* infections.
- Skin benefits:** The vitamins and antioxidants in avocados contribute to skin health. They may help promote a youthful complexion and combat the effects of oxidative stress on the skin.
- Hydration:** Avocados have high water content, contributing to hydration. Proper hydration is essential for overall health and supports various body functions.
- Protection from chronic disease:** The monounsaturated fatty acids in avocados may be trusted source beneficial in preventing chronic conditions, such as cardiovascular diseases. Optimal intake of fibre may reduce the risk of stroke, hypertension, diabetes, obesity and certain gastrointestinal diseases. It also lowers blood pressure and cholesterol levels, improves insulin sensitivity and enhances weight loss in people with obesity.

CONCLUSION

Incorporating avocados into a balanced diet can be a delicious way to enhance overall well-being. It provide good amount of nutrition and health benefits. Consumption of right quantity of avocado fruits may benefit to maintain good health for longer time. However, avocado has high fat content, so adding too much into the diet might lead to unintended weight gain. Therefore, knowledge on right amount of avocado consumption is most important to get more health benefits from this wonderful fruit.

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