

Other K-sensation

Caroline Hopkins Legaspis on the many virtues of the kiwi

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

These brown, fuzzy fruits with green, yellow or even red flesh are packed with beneficial nutrients such as fibre 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," says Judy Simon, a clinical dietitian at the University of Washington Medical Center in Seattle in the US.

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

Nutrient rich

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

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

Fibre also binds to "bad" cholesterol, or LDL, in the intestine, helping to remove it from your body, Simon says. Excess LDL can lead to a build-up of plaque in your arteries, increasing your risk of having heart attacks and strokes.

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

One kiwi contains about 150 milligrams of potassium — a "nice amount", Simon says. (A banana has about 400 milligrams.) Potassium helps prevent high blood pressure by offsetting the effects of too much sodium, Davis says. Kiwis also have beneficial unsaturated fats, which can help you absorb some fat-soluble vitamins they contain, such as vitamins A and E, Simon says.

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

Constipation relief

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, says Dr Eswaran, who is a gastroenterologist at Michigan Medicine, US. But you

would need to eat four prunes to get as much fibre as you would from one kiwi. And in her experience, people tend to enjoy kiwis more, she says.

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 says. 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 says. 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 says.

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.

Sleep aid

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 says.

"It's an interesting connection," she says. "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 says. 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.

Best way to eat

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

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 recommends starting with the yellow varieties. These tend to have less fuzz.



ISTOCK.COM/MULANMAKSONIC