

Eat Your Prunes

Analysis by [Dr. Joseph Mercola](#)

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Prunes are simply dried plums, just like raisins are dried grapes. More specifically, prunes are sun-dried plums that skipped the fermentation process
- › For centuries, traditional medicine made use of prunes for treating fever, high blood pressure, jaundice, diabetes, digestion and constipation, still one of this dried fruit's most popular remedies
- › Fiber, potassium, iron and retinol from vitamin A, plus high amounts of vitamin K, iron and boron are nutrients in prunes, providing antioxidants, flavonoids and polyphenols for health advantages throughout your body
- › Eating prunes may help lower the risk of bone loss and improve gut health, and has been shown in multiple studies to help lower the risk of colon cancer

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If your impression of [prunes](#) is that they're something old people eat for help with regularity (although there is that), you could use a bit more information about the benefits of this delicious food. For some people, prunes have somehow gleaned a reputation as dry, mealy and terrible-tasting, but that couldn't be further from the truth. Sure, they may look a little odd, being a wrinkly, purple-to-black lump, but they're tasty to the point of crave-worthy.

In case you're not familiar with prunes, they're simply [dried plums](#), just like raisins are dried grapes. More specifically, prunes are sun-dried plums that skipped the

fermentation process.¹ To make the moist little morsels more intriguing to 25- through 54-year-old females, the California Prune Board asked the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to begin referring to prunes as "dried plums."

It must be working, as prune consumption shifted. Europe is on the receiving end of 40% of the California prune market, and it's jumped 37% in just the last year, Fresh Plaza, a global produce news site, notes:

*"It is moving away from the traditional home baking and breakfast occasions into the acceptance of prunes as a healthy snack and a versatile ingredient for home cooking. Chefs from all around the world are starting to recognize the significant benefits of including prunes in a whole range of recipes."*²

Prunes, much like peaches, are referred to as "freestone," meaning the large pit in the center can stay intact through the drying process, then be easily removed before packaging. Medicine throughout centuries made use of prunes for fever, **high blood pressure**, jaundice, diabetes, digestion and constipation, still one of its most popular remedies.

Eat Your Prunes – They're Good for You

Just like raisins, prunes offer chewy sweetness and amazing versatility as well as plenty of surprising nutrients. Fiber, potassium, iron and **vitamin A** are some of its most prominent nutrients,³ as are vitamin K and beta-carotene.

While I don't recommend you eat an entire cup (174 grams) of pitted prunes in one sitting due to their fructose content (21.6 grams), but if you did, you'd get 12.4 grams, or 49%,⁴ of the recommended dietary allowance (RDI) of fiber, which is what U.S. health organizations say you need for one day (I believe about 25 to 50 grams of fiber per 1,000 calories consumed is ideal, however).

Fiber is crucial for moving food smoothly through your colon, which automatically lowers your risk of **colon cancer**. In fact, two studies – the Prostate, Lung, Colorectal and Ovarian (PLCO) Screening Trial and another by the European Prospective

Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition (EPIC) – noted that "dietary fiber intake is inversely related to the incidence of colon adenomas and cancer."⁵

Other studies have come to the same conclusion, such as one conducted in 2015 by researchers at Texas A&M. Nancy Turner, an associate professor belonging to the nutrition and food science department, showed that dried plum consumption provides beneficial effects by helping your colon retain advantageous gut microbiota.⁶

The 37.3% RDI in potassium (in adult males),⁷ a mineral crucial for good health, you get from eating 1 cup of prunes helps balance the chemical and electrical processes in your body, lowers your risk of stroke and heart disease along with your blood pressure, and optimizes several other important body functions.

In the same cup of prunes, you also get 129% of the RDI in vitamin K, which may help prevent inflammation and osteoporosis and improve your insulin sensitivity.⁸ Other prominent nutrients in prunes include more than 20% RDI of several B vitamins⁹ along with notable amounts of vitamin A, calcium, magnesium, zinc, copper, manganese, selenium and boron.

Prunes Should Be Eaten in Moderation

Prunes are a rich source of simple sugars, including fructose. Despite this, research has shown dried plums do not lead to a rapid rise in blood sugar concentration when consumed,¹⁰ possibly due to their high fiber and sorbitol content. However, the fructose still constitutes good reason to limit your intake, as is true in regard to consuming most other fruits. Fruits such as plums and prunes can be good for you, but in limited amounts.

One medium prune contains 1.2 grams of fructose. If you're insulin- or leptin-resistant (are overweight, diabetic, hypertensive or have high cholesterol), then it would be especially advisable for you to limit your fruit intake.

As a general rule, I recommend limiting your fructose intake to a maximum of 15 grams of fructose per day from all sources, including whole fruit. If you are not insulin-/leptin-

resistant (are of normal weight without diabetes, hypertension or high cholesterol) I suggest limiting your fructose intake to 25 grams per day (or less) from all sources.

What Have Prunes Done for You Lately?

Prunes, as you've already read, contain a lot of extremely health-beneficial nutrients. It's how they relate to your body in terms of disease prevention, however, that makes them so valuable. The end conclusion of one study, for instance, reported in the Journal of Medicinal Plants Research, lists several of those benefits:

"Prunes have been found pharmacologically active as antioxidant, anticancer, anxiolytic, mild laxative and antihyperlipidemic. Their efficacy in treatment and prevention of ... osteoporosis has been documented in clinical studies.

It exerts positive effects on cardiovascular parameters possibly through antioxidant activities, high fiber and potassium contents. In conclusion, prunes have wide range of nutritional and medicinal uses and daily consumption can be beneficial in the treatment or prevention of different ailments."¹¹

Flavonoid polyphenolic antioxidants in plums, such as lutein and cryptoxanthin, help scavenge free radicals from your body. Free radicals come from toxins that enter your body through your skin and the air you breathe, such as **pollution and toxic fumes** from household cleaners, food dyes and other unhealthy food ingredients. Free radicals are also produced normally during metabolism.

Bahram H. Arjmandi, Ph.D., professor emeritus at Florida State University, was one of the first to investigate "estrogen receptors in the gut to aid in calcium transport and to demonstrate the efficacy of dried plum in protecting bone in both animal models of osteoporosis and postmenopausal women."¹² NDTV quotes Arjmandi:

"Over my career, I have tested numerous fruits, including figs, dates, strawberries and raisins, and none of them come anywhere close to having the effect on bone density that dried plums or prunes have. All fruits and vegetables

*have a positive effect on nutrition, but in terms of bone health, this particular food is exceptional."*¹³

Other Good Things You Get From Eating Prunes

The incredible compounds in prunes provide several benefits that may seem unrelated, which just goes to show you how all-encompassing such nutrients can be. Here are several more super advantages you gain:

1. **Prunes are considered heart-healthy**, mostly due to the **potassium** content, which optimizes heart function and nerve responses throughout your body. Daily potassium intake helps lower your blood pressure, as well as your risk of heart disease, heart attack and stroke.
2. **Prunes help fight osteoporosis**, in part due to the boron content, which Alive, a health and wellness site, explains:

*"Helps regulate mineral metabolism and optimizes estrogen levels, which in turn increases calcium absorption. Additionally, boron helps convert vitamin D to its active form, which helps the osteoblasts [bone-building cells] utilize calcium for bone formation."*¹⁴

3. **Eating prunes benefits your hair and skin** due to the array of vitamins and minerals they provide, which even **help slow signs of aging**, such as wrinkles. **Adequate amounts of iron** helps reduce the risk of a deficiency that can show up in dry, discolored hair, and even hair loss.
4. **Prune consumption benefits your vision** due to high vitamin A, which produces **retinol**. Being deficient in this vitamin is a leading cause of **macular degeneration**, dry eyes, cataracts and night blindness.
5. **The nutrients in prunes go a long way**. Nutritionist Anshul Jaibharat offers both a caution and an encouragement:

"Prunes are high in natural sugar, so too many may not be good for people watching their weight. After all, excess of anything is stored as fat in your body. Prunes have such high nutritional values ensuring that you can eat just one piece and still gain measurable nutrients."¹⁵

Is Prune Juice Beneficial for Constipation?

You've no doubt heard about the effects of prune juice being a good laxative. In fact, studies have shown it to be even more effective than [psyllium husk](#) at treating constipation.¹⁶ Prune juice, too, is lauded for decreasing the "transit time" of foods in your digestive tract.

For people with constipation, eating the whole prune may be enough to get things moving, and I recommend trying this first. Again, a study noted that prunes were better at helping relieve constipation compared to psyllium.¹⁷

I do not, however, recommend drinking prune juice regularly or in large quantities because of the sugar content. If chronic constipation is a problem for you, there are many other natural strategies to treat it. Constipation aside, here are a few more ways to incorporate whole prunes into your diet:

- Use kitchen shears to cut prunes in smaller pieces to toss into salad greens or mixed with quinoa and [coconut](#) meat.
- They're a great snack for traveling, whether you're in the car or on a walking trail, and even in your lunchbox.
- An ounce (28 grams) can be added to smoothies for a bit of natural sweetness, as well as extra antioxidants and fiber.
- Pitted prunes and a little water in your food processor produces a tasty topping for everything from [banana bread made from coconut flour](#) to homemade vanilla bean ice cream sweetened with stevia. (As is nearly always the case, the healthiest recipes are those you make yourself.)

- Try adding a handful of prunes to savory dishes such as chicken with rosemary and basil.

Sources and References

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