

How Healthy Are Avocados?

Here's a highlight reel of their biggest nutritional benefits, plus delicious recipes to help you enjoy them.

By Caroline Hopkins

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Ripe, creamy avocados are great on toast, salads and burgers, or just sprinkled with salt. Plus, they're healthy — but how healthy?

“Avocados are no regular fruits,” said Dr. Frank Hu, a professor of nutrition and epidemiology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. “They're nutrient dense with very little carbohydrates and high amounts of healthy fats and fiber.” And they make plant-based meals more filling.

Here are some of their healthiest attributes, plus a selection of recipes from New York Times Cooking to inspire you to eat them more often.

Avocados can help keep your cholesterol in check.

Avocados' better-known benefits stem from their heart-healthy fats, said Elizabeth Klingbeil, a registered dietitian and assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin. Most of the fats in avocados are monounsaturated, which differ from the saturated fats abundant in meats and dairy.

“Saturated fats can gunk up your blood vessels and increase your heart disease risk,” Dr. Klingbeil said. If left unchecked, this gunk, called LDL or “bad” cholesterol, can lead to heart attacks or strokes.

While saturated fats increase LDL cholesterol, unsaturated fats can lower it. For this reason, avocados can help manage blood cholesterol levels, especially when you eat them in place of foods like meat, cheese and butter.

They may lower your heart disease risk.

In a study that followed more than 110,000 adults over 30 years, Dr. Hu and his colleagues showed that people who ate at least two servings of avocado per week had a 21 percent lower risk of coronary heart disease.

The researchers used statistics to account for other factors that could have affected people's heart health. Still, Dr. Hu said, it's impossible to say if avocados directly reduced the risk.



Bobbi Lin for The New York Times

Zeroing in on one food as the cause of health outcomes is challenging, explained Dr. Martin Kohlmeier, a professor at the University of North Carolina Nutrition Research Institute.

Because avocados make great substitutions for less healthy foods, studies showing their benefits might in part reflect the benefits of cutting back on other stuff — like using avocado instead of mayonnaise on a sandwich, or adding more avocado, and less beef, to a burrito.

“Many reported effects are replacement effects, not necessarily avocado effects,” Dr. Kohlmeier said.

Dr. Hu added that people who eat avocados might be more likely to have a healthy diet in general.

They can support your gut microbiome.

Avocados are high in fiber, Dr. Klingbeil said, which can help you maintain a healthy weight and promote a healthy gut.

When gut bacteria digest fiber, they release small molecules called postbiotics that affect our overall health, said Dr. Zhaoping Li, a professor of medicine and chief of the division of clinical nutrition at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Healthy bacteria can also signal to our brain when we’re full, Dr. Klingbeil said.

Dr. Hu said avocados can help you meet your daily fiber goals, which is important since studies show most people don’t eat enough fiber.

People should aim for at least 21 to 38 grams of fiber daily, depending on their age and sex. A whole avocado clocks in around 10 grams.

They’re rich in micronutrients.

The vitamin E in avocados may support healthy skin, Dr. Klingbeil said. According to Dr. Kohlmeier, the lutein in avocados may help keep your vision sharp.

And while bananas tend to get all the credit for potassium, avocados contain even more of the important mineral. Potassium helps your body reduce high blood pressure, Dr. Hu said.

Here's how to enjoy them.

No single food makes your diet healthy or unhealthy. The real benefit comes from eating avocados as part of a diverse, balanced diet filled with fruits, vegetables, whole grains and healthy protein.

These recipes from NYT Cooking will help you do just that.

Recipe: Avocado Soup With Chile Oil

As delicious cold as it is room temperature, this silky soup gets a hit of heat from chile oil and crunch from toasted pepitas.



Christopher Simpson for The New York Times. Food Stylist: Simon Andrews.

Recipe: Smashed Cucumber, Avocado and Shrimp Salad

The creaminess of avocado balances the tangy rice vinegar and soy dressing in this sesame-flecked shrimp salad.



Johnny Miller for The New York Times. Food Stylist: Rebecca Jurkevich.

Recipe: Salt and Vinegar Kale Chips With Fried Chickpeas and Avocado

Silky against the crackle of kale chips, avocado brings richness to this vegetarian brunch dish that tastes just as good at dinner.



Julia Gartland for The New York Times. Food Stylist: Samantha Seneviratne.

Recipe: Quinoa Salad With Chicken, Almonds and Avocado

In this easy make-ahead lunch, tiny quinoa cling to the avocado, mellow against the mustard vinaigrette.



Linda Xiao for The New York Times

Recipe: Garlic Chicken With Guasacaca Sauce

Spicy guasacaca sauce — a blend of cilantro, parsley, jalapeño and avocado — makes garlicky roasted chicken (and just about any other meat, seafood or vegetable) utterly delicious.



David Malosh for The New York Times. Food Stylist: Simon Andrews.