

Cool as a Cucumber!

Cucumbers belong to the same plant family as squash, pumpkin, and watermelon (the Cucurbitaceae family). Like watermelon, cucumbers are made up of mostly (95 percent) water, which means eating them on a hot summer day can help you stay hydrated.

However, there's reason to eat cucumbers all year long. With vitamin K, B vitamins, copper, potassium, vitamin C, and manganese, cucumbers can help you to avoid nutrient deficiencies that are widespread among those eating a typical American diet.

Plus, cucumbers contain unique polyphenols and other compounds that may help reduce your risk of chronic diseases and much, much more.

Reasons to Eat Cucumbers

- **Protect Your Brain**

Cucumbers contain an anti-inflammatory flavonol called fisetin that appears to play an important role in brain health. In addition to improving your memory and protecting your nerve cells from age-related decline, fisetin has been found to prevent progressive memory and learning impairments in mice with Alzheimer's disease.

- **Reduce Your Risk of Cancer**

Cucumbers contain polyphenols called lignans (pinoresinol, lariciresinol, and secoisolariciresinol), which may help to lower your risk of breast, uterine, ovarian, and prostate cancers. They also contain phytonutrients called cucurbitacins, which also have anti-cancer properties. According to the George Mateljan Foundation:

"Scientists have already determined that several different signaling pathways (for example, the JAK-STAT and MAPK pathways) required for cancer cell development and survival can be blocked by activity of cucurbitacins."

- **Fight Inflammation**

Cucumbers may help to "cool" the inflammatory response in your body, and animal studies suggest that cucumber extract helps reduce unwanted inflammation, in part by inhibiting the activity of pro-inflammatory enzymes (including cyclo-oxygenase 2, or COX-2).

- **Antioxidant Properties**

Cucumbers contain numerous antioxidants, including the well-known vitamin C and

beta-carotene. They also contain antioxidant flavonoids, such as quercetin, apigenin, luteolin, and kaempferol,⁶ which provide additional benefits.

For instance, quercetin is an antioxidant that many believe prevents histamine release—making quercetin-rich foods "natural antihistamines." Kaempferol, meanwhile, may help fight cancer and lower your risk of chronic diseases including heart disease.

- Freshen Your Breath

Placing a cucumber slice on the roof of your mouth may help to rid your mouth of odor-causing bacteria. According to the principles of Ayurveda, eating cucumbers may also help to release excess heat in your stomach, which is said to be a primary cause of bad breath.⁷

- Manage Stress

Cucumbers contain multiple B vitamins, including vitamin B1, vitamin B5, and vitamin B7 (biotin). B vitamins are known to help ease feelings of anxiety and buffer some of the damaging effects of stress.

- Support Your Digestive Health

Cucumbers are rich in two of the most basic elements needed for healthy digestion: water and fiber. If you struggle with acid reflux, you should know that drinking water can help suppress acute symptoms of acid reflux by temporarily raising stomach pH; it's possible that water-rich cucumbers may have a similar effect.

Cucumber skins contain insoluble fiber, which helps add bulk to your stool. This helps food to *move through your digestive tract more quickly* for healthy elimination.

Cucumbers Make a Great Base for Vegetable Juice There are many ways to enjoy cucumbers, such as fermented or raw in vinegar-based salads. If you're looking for something different, cucumbers make an ideal base for your vegetable juice due to their mild flavor and high water content. In fact, a simple juice of cucumber and celery is ideal for those new to juicing.

From there you can work your way up to red leaf lettuce, romaine lettuce, spinach, and escarole, along with parsley and cilantro. Juicing is actually an ideal way to consume cucumbers.

When you drink fresh-made green juice, it is almost like receiving an intravenous infusion of vitamins, minerals, and enzymes because they go straight into your system without having to be broken down. When your body has an abundance of the nutrients it needs, and your pH is optimally balanced, you will feel energized and your immune system will get a boost.

Organic Cucumbers Are Worth It If you're wondering whether you should choose organic cucumbers over conventionally grown varieties, I'd suggest organic. Cucumbers were ranked the 12th most contaminated food and the second in cancer risk due to their pesticide content, according to the Environmental Working Group (EWG).

Further, cucumbers are often waxed after harvest to withstand the long journey to market unscarred and to protect against the many hands that touch it. While the wax is supposed to be food-grade and safe, there are different types used:⁹

- Carnauba wax (from the carnauba palm tree)
- Beeswax
- Shellac (from the lac beetle)
- Petroleum-based waxes

The natural waxes are far preferable to the petroleum-based waxes, which may contain solvent residues or wood rosin. Produce coated with wax is not labeled as such, but organic produce will not contain petroleum-based wax coatings (although it may contain carnauba wax or insect shellac).

The other potential issue is that wax seals in pesticide residues and debris, making them even more difficult to remove with just water. To reach the contaminants buried beneath the surface of your vegetables and fruits, you need a cleanser that also removes the wax, which is what my fruit and vegetable wash does. You could also peel the cucumber, but that is one of the most nutrient-dense parts of the cucumber (the other is the seeds), so it's better to consume it if you can



Herb Infused Tea with Cucumber, Lavender, and Mint

Recipe By: Jeanne Kelley Author of *Kitchen Garden Cookbook*

Ingredients:

5 Green Tea Bags
18-20 Fresh Mint Sprigs
3 Fresh Sprigs of Whole Lavender Blossoms
8 Cups of Boiling Water
1 Cucumber Sliced
1 Lemon Cut in 8 Rounds
Honey (optional)
Ice Cubes to Serve

In a large heatproof pitcher, combine the tea bags, 12 of the mint sprigs, and the lavender. Pour in the water and let steep for 8 minutes. Remove the tea bags and let the tea cool to room temperature. Add the cucumber and lemon, cover, and refrigerate, for at least 1 hour or preferably overnight.

Taste the tea and sweeten with a little honey, if desired, stirring until the honey dissolves. Fill tall glasses with ice cubes, and strain the tea into the glasses. Garnish each glass with a mint sprig and serve.