

Avocado:

Friend or foe?

Franci Cohen, Nutritionist

With avocados popping up on menus everywhere, I want you to be informed of the many beneficial aspects of this fruit, as well as wary about “healthy” avocado dishes that are actually anything but.

Avocados have fast become a staple favorite for men and women alike. Whether you prefer raw slices sprinkled with salt and pepper, spread on toast to replace unhealthy spreads, or mashed up with salsa to make guacamole, it is safe to say that avocados are delicious. Even more, they are packed to the brim with vitamins and nutrients! With avocados popping up on menus everywhere, I want you to be informed of the many beneficial aspects of this fruit, as well as wary about “healthy” avocado dishes that are actually anything but.

When eaten right, avocado has great nutritional value for your diet. But the problem is that many people see the ingredient ‘avocado’ and immediately think the dish is healthy, when it is actually full of fattening ingredients as well.

Health benefits of avocados:

Heart healthy: Avocados are high in vitamin B6 and

folic acid; both help regulate homocysteine levels - thereby reducing the risk of heart disease. Additionally, avocados also contain vitamin E, glutathione, and mono-saturated fat, which help in maintaining a healthy heart.

Lower cholesterol: Avocados are high in beta-sitosterol, which is a compound effective in lowering blood cholesterol levels. In our bodies, there are two different kinds of cholesterol: HDL cholesterol is a type of cholesterol that is beneficial to your body and LDL cholesterol is not beneficial and actually can increase your risk of heart disease. If you worry about your body’s cholesterol levels, avocados are a great solution because they will actually lower your LDL and increase your HDL levels.

Anti-inflammatory agent: Phytonutrient compounds found in avocados, such as polyphenols and flavonoids, contain active anti-inflammatory properties

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and have been proven effective in reducing the risk of inflammatory conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis and others.

Regulates Blood Sugar Levels: Although some people initially think they should stay away from avocados due to their fat content, this is definitely a misconception. The monounsaturated (good) fats in avocados have an amazing ability to reverse insulin resistance, thereby regulating blood sugar levels. Furthermore, avocados also contain soluble fiber, which maintains steady blood sugar levels throughout the day.

Cancer-fighting agent: I have found studies that have shown avocados to inhibit the growth of prostate cancer and to prevent breast cancer. Avocados contain glutathione, a powerful antioxidant that helps prevent free radical damage in the body, which can often be a precursor to most dangers.

Increases bioavailability of nutrients in the body: Avocado intake is linked with an increased nutrient absorption. In fact, avocado consumption can increase the body's absorption of vitamins and minerals from food sources by five times the normal absorption rate!

When to be wary:

With avocados being such a trendy item, chefs and home cooks alike have been incorporating it as an ingredient as much as they can. While it is considered a "healthy food," when added to certain dishes the benefits can be either lost or cancelled out. For instance, avocado

fries, or avocado tempura, may seem like a healthy option, but just because the base of this appetizer is heart-healthy avocado, does not negate the unhealthy trans fats filtering into your bloodstream as you consume this indulgent food.

Another avocado dish to stay away from is mayonnaise and dairy based avocado dips and spreads. They are generally laden with fat and empty calories. Adding a little bit of avocado to these fatty dips does not magically transform them into being healthy, it just makes the dish appear healthier to diners. In fact, you are simply adding additional fat from the avocado to an already calorically dense, high-fat dip. Even though the avocado is good fat, it is still fat in the end. Add an even fattier tortilla or potato chip as the dip vessel and you've found yourself in fat overload!



Franci Cohen is a personal trainer, and a certified nutritionist with a Masters degree in nutrition from Brooklyn College. She is also an exercise physiologist and creator of SPIDERBANDS®. Franci devotes much of her time to Fuel Fitness, a specialty fitness center in Brooklyn, NY and continues to teach group fitness classes, train clients, and broaden her perspective in all areas of fitness, nutrition, and wellness.