**11 Proven Health Benefits of Quinoa**

Quinoa is one of the world's most popular health foods.

Quinoa is gluten-free, high in protein and one of the few plant foods that contain all nine essential amino acids.

It is also high in fiber, magnesium, B-vitamins, iron, potassium, calcium, phosphorus, vitamin E and various beneficial antioxidants.

Here are 11 health benefits of quinoa:

1. Very Nutritious

Quinoa is a grain crop that is grown for its edible seeds. It is pronounced *KEEN-wah*.

It technically isn't a cereal grain, but a pseudo-cereal (1).

In other words, it is basically a "seed" which is prepared and eaten similarly to a grain.

Quinoa was an important crop for the Inca Empire back in the day. They referred to it as the "mother of all grains" and believed it to be sacred.

It has been consumed for thousands of years in South America, although it only became trendy and reached "superfood status" a few years ago.

These days, you can find quinoa and products made with it all over the world, especially in health food stores and restaurants that emphasize natural foods.

There are three main types: white, red and black.

This is the nutrient content in 1 cup (185 grams). This applies to cooked quinoa (2):

* **Protein:** 8 grams.
* **Fiber:** 5 grams.
* **Manganese:** 58% of the RDA.
* **Magnesium:** 30% of the RDA.
* **Phosphorus:** 28% of the RDA.
* **Folate:** 19% of the RDA.
* **Copper:** 18% of the RDA.
* **Iron:** 15% of the RDA.
* **Zinc:** 13% of the RDA.
* **Potassium:** 9% of the RDA.
* Over 10% of the RDA for vitamins B1, B2 and B6.
* Small amounts of calcium, B3 (niacin) and vitamin E.

This is coming with a total of 222 calories, with 39 grams of carbs and 4 grams of fat. It also contains a small amount of omega-3 fatty acids.

Quinoa is non-GMO, gluten-free and usually grown organically. Even though technically not a grain, it still counts as a whole grain food.

NASA scientists have been looking at it as a suitable crop to be grown in outer space, mostly based on its high nutrient content, ease of use and how easy it is to grow (3).

The year 2013 was actually called "The International Year of Quinoa" by the United Nations (UN), based on its high nutrient value and potential to contribute to food security worldwide (4).

**Bottom Line:** Quinoa is an edible seed that has become very trendy among health conscious people. It is loaded with many important nutrients.

2. Contains The Plant Compounds Quercetin And Kaempferol

The health effects of real foods go way beyond the vitamins and minerals we're all familiar with.

There are thousands of trace nutrients in there, some of which are extremely healthy.

This includes interesting molecules called flavonoids, which are plant antioxidants that have been shown to have all sorts of beneficial effects on health.

Two flavonoids that have been particularly well studied are quercetin and kaempferol, and they happen to be found in large amounts in quinoa (5).

In fact, the quercetin content of quinoa is even higher than typical high-quercetin foods like cranberries (6).

These important molecules have been shown to have anti-inflammatory, anti-viral, anti-cancer and anti-depressant effects in animal studies (7, 8, 9, 10).

By including quinoa in your diet, you will significantly increase your total intake of these (and other) important nutrients.

**Bottom Line:** It contains large amounts of flavonoids, including quercetin and kaempferol. These are potent plant antioxidants with numerous health benefits.

3. Very High in Fiber, Much Higher Than Most Grains

Another important benefit of quinoa is that it is high in fiber.

One study that looked at 4 varieties of quinoa found a range of between 10 and 16 grams of fiber, per every 100 grams (11).

This equals 17-27 grams per cup, which is very high, more than twice as high as most grains. Boiled quinoa contains much less fiber, gram for gram, because it absorbs so much water.

Unfortunately, most of the fiber is *insoluble* fiber, which doesn't appear to have the same health benefits as *soluble* fiber.

That being said, the soluble fiber content is about 2.5 grams per cup (or 1.5 grams per 100 grams), which is still decent.

There are numerous studies showing that soluble fiber can help reduce blood sugar levels, lower cholesterol, increase fullness and help with weight loss (12, 13, 14).

**Bottom Line:** Quinoa is much higher in fiber than most grains, with one source finding 17-27 grams of fiber per cup.

4. Gluten-Free And Perfect For People With Gluten Intolerance

According to a 2013 survey, about a third of people in the U.S. are currently trying to minimize or avoid gluten.

A gluten-free diet can be healthy, as long as it is based on foods that are *naturally* gluten free.

The problems arise when people eat "gluten free" foods made with refined starches instead.

These foods are no better than their gluten-containing counterparts, because gluten free junk food is still junk food.

Many researchers have been looking at quinoa as a suitable ingredient in gluten-free diets, for people who don't want to give up staples like breads and pasta.

Studies have shown that by using quinoa instead of typical gluten-free ingredients like refined tapioca, potato, corn and rice flour, it can dramatically increase the nutrient and antioxidant value of the diet (15, 16).

**Bottom Line:** Quinoa is naturally free of gluten and using it instead of typical gluten-free ingredients can increase the antioxidant and nutrient value of a gluten-free diet.

5. Very High in Protein, With All The Essential Amino Acids

Protein is made out of amino acids. Some of them are termed "essential" because we can not produce them and need to get them from the diet.

If a food contains all the essential amino acids, it is seen as a "complete" protein.

The problem is that many plant foods are deficient in certain essential amino acids, such as lysine.

However, quinoa is an exception to this, because it contains all the essential amino acids. For this reason, it is an excellent source of protein. It has both *more* and *better* protein than most grains (17).

With 8 grams of quality protein per cup, quinoa is an excellent plant-based protein source for vegetarians and vegans.

**Bottom Line:** It is high in protein compared to most plant foods. It also contains all the essential amino acids that we need.

6. Has a Low Glycemic Index, Which is Good For Blood Sugar Control

The glycemic index is a measure of how quickly foods raise blood sugar levels.

It is known that eating foods that are high on the glycemic index can stimulate hunger and contribute to obesity (18, 19).

Such foods have also been linked to many of the chronic, Western diseases that are so common today, like type 2 diabetes and heart disease (20).

Quinoa has a glycemic index of 53, which is considered low (21).

However, it's important to keep in mind that it is still pretty high in carbs, so it is not a good choice for a low-carb diet.

**Bottom Line:** The glycemic index of quinoa is around 53, which is considered low. However, it is still relatively high in carbohydrates.

7. High in Important Minerals Like Iron And Magnesium

There are many nutrients in the modern diet that people tend to be lacking in.

This is particularly true of some minerals, especially magnesium, potassium, zinc and (for women) iron.

Interestingly, quinoa is very high in all 4 minerals. It is particularly high in magnesium, with one cup having about 30% of the RDA.

The problem is that it also contains a substance called phytic acid, which can bind these minerals and reduce their absorption (22).

However, by soaking and/or sprouting the quinoa before cooking it, you can reduce the phytic acid content and make these minerals more bioavailable.

Quinoa is also pretty high in oxalates, which reduce the absorption of calcium and can cause problems for certain individuals with recurring kidney stones (23, 24).

**Bottom Line:** Quinoa is very high in minerals, but the phytic acid can partly prevent them from being absorbed. Soaking or sprouting degrades most of the phytic acid.

8. Has Beneficial Effects on Metabolic Health

Given the high amount of beneficial nutrients, it makes sense that quinoa could lead to improvements in metabolic health.

Although this needs to be studied more thoroughly, I did find two studies (one in humans, the other in rats) that examined the effects on metabolic health.

The human study found that using quinoa instead of typical gluten-free breads and pastas significantly reduced blood sugar, insulin and triglyceride levels (25).

The rat study found that adding quinoa to a diet high in fructose almost completely inhibited the negative effects of fructose (26).

**Bottom Line:** Two studies, one in humans and the other in rats, show that quinoa can improve metabolic health. This includes lower blood sugar and triglyceride levels.

9. Very High in Antioxidants

Quinoa also happens to be very high in antioxidants.

Antioxidants are substances that neutralize free radicals and are believed to help fight aging and many diseases.

One study looked at antioxidants in 10 foods: 5 cereals, 3 pseudocereals and 2 legumes.

Quinoa had the highest antioxidant content of all 10 (27).

Allowing the seeds to sprout seems to increase the antioxidant content even further (28).

**Bottom Line:** Quinoa appears to be very high in antioxidants, which are increased even further after the seeds are sprouted.

10. May Help You Lose Weight

In order to lose weight, we need to take in fewer calories than we burn.

It is known that certain properties of foods can facilitate this process, either by boosting metabolism (increasing calories out) or reducing appetite (lowering calories in).

Interestingly, quinoa has several such properties.

It is high in protein, which can both increase metabolism and reduce appetite significantly (29).

The high amount of fiber should also help to increase feelings of fullness, making you eat fewer caloriesoverall (30).

The fact that quinoa has a low glycemic index is another important feature, but choosing such foods has been linked to reduced calorie intake (31).

Although there is currently no study that looks at the effects of quinoa on body weight, it seems intuitive that it could be a useful part of a healthy weight loss diet.

**Bottom Line:** Quinoa is high in fiber, protein and has a low glycemic index. These properties have all been linked to weight loss and improved health.

11. Easy to Incorporate Into The Diet

The last one is not a health benefit, but still incredibly important.

It is the fact that quinoa is very easy to incorporate into your diet.

It is also tasty and goes well with many foods.

Depending on the type of quinoa, it can be important to rinse it with water in order to get rid of saponins, which are found on the outer layer and can have a bitter flavor.

However, some brands have already been rinsed, so this may not be necessary.

You can buy quinoa in most health food stores and many supermarkets.

It can be ready to eat in as little as 15-20 minutes:

* Put 2 cups of water in a pot, turn up the heat.
* Add 1 cup of raw quinoa, with a dash of salt.
* Boil for 15-20 minutes.
* Eat.

It should now have absorbed most of the water and gotten a fluffy look. If done right, it should have a mild, nutty flavour and a satisfying crunch.

Then there are dozens of other delicious ways to use quinoa.

Why You Should Try Quinoa

At the end of the day, quinoa is one of the healthiest and most nutritious foods on the planet. That is a fact.

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