

**Healthy Bytes Initiative Article**

**July 2019 Watermelon**



**Summer Watermelon**

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One staple for a summer picnic or outing includes watermelon.

But don’t be fooled by its juicy, sweet taste. It contains healthy vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that protect us from cancer, heart disease and diabetes.

Watermelon’s highest nutrient is *lycopene,* an antioxidant famous in tomatoes which provides the red and pink color. This nutrient is known to be protective against cancer, especially prostate cancer, and diabetes. Seedless varieties have been found to contain higher lycopene concentrations. *Citrulline,* an amino acid in watermelon, is a precursor to arginine, a key ingredient in the production of nitric oxide or NO. NO improves blood flow and lowers blood pressure, making citrulline protective against heart disease and other circulatory problems associated with diabetes and erectile dysfunction. Citrulline has also been shown to reduce muscle soreness after exercise.

Watermelon is also high in antioxidant vitamins C and A for healthy skin, hair and eyes, and B vitamins biotin and folate. *Choline* is another nutrient similar to a B vitamin that supports the liver, brain development, nerve and muscle function and a healthy metabolism. Choline may also aid in reducing inflammation and improving sleep. Watermelon also contains minerals magnesium and calcium for healthy bones, and small amounts of iron.

When selecting a ripe watermelon, look for fruit free of dents and bruises, and more dull than glossy. It should feel heavy and sound hollow when thumped. The “farm spot” or “field spot” where the melon laid on the ground should be yellow, not white. Uncut melon can be stored at room temperatures. Wash fruit before slicing so the knife does not transfer bacteria inside the fruit. Although best if consumed right after slicing, cut melon can be stored in the fridge for several days. When serving outdoors, keep cut melon slices or cubes cold in the cooler or on an ice tray.

Save the seeds! Watermelon seeds contain higher concentrations of nutrients. Roast watermelon seeds and sprinkle on salads, or grind and use in baked goods. Even the watermelon rind is a rich culinary treat, and can often be found pickled. Be sure to select certified organic watermelon if using the rind for pickling.

Use watermelon as a healthy, refreshing snack by itself, or toss on your green salad or throw in smoothies. Mix watermelon with cucumber and fresh herbs to create a bright side dish or freeze melon with a little lime juice for a refreshing summer ice. Watermelon is not just a summer experience, it’s a healthy addition to our seasonal diet.