



PRUNES AT WORK: A PLUM JOB

Prunes are the dried version of a kind of European plum called *Prunus domestica*. They are packed with all kinds of healthy goodness—fibre, potassium, Vitamin A, B, K, calcium, magnesium, iron, zinc, copper, manganese, selenium and boron.

FIBRE OPTIMUM

A serving size of six prunes has 4 grams of dietary fibre and half a cup contains 6 grams. Women typically need 25 grams of fibre each day, while men need at least 30 grams. Prunes are high in fibre and can help you regulate your bowels and your bladder.

Dried plums retain both soluble and insoluble fibre as well as sorbitol. Soluble fibre helps to slow down the absorption of glucose which stabilises blood glucose level. 80% of the fibre in prunes is soluble fibre which helps to lower blood cholesterol.

Soluble fibre also increases insulin sensitivity and can therefore play a helpful role in the prevention and treatment of Type 2 diabetes. Moreover, prunes have lower GI when compared to other common dry fruits such as raisins, figs and dates. This low GI number is because of the fibre it is packed with. The soluble fibre of prunes promotes a sense of satisfied fullness after a meal by slowing the rate at which food leaves the stomach, so prunes can also help prevent overeating and weight gain.

Prunes have about 15% sorbitol while other fruits contain less than 5%. Sorbitol, like fibre, absorbs more water and also increases the intestinal microorganisms that improves the gut's health.

Prunes are also rich in glucose, fructose and sucrose. But prunes do not spike blood sugar because it is compact with natural fibre.

Fresh plums are filled with water and packed with water soluble vitamin C, too. Vitamin C is a powerful antioxidant that helps prevent the formation of free radicals in the body. However, during the process of drying, plums tend to lose its water and vitamin C and ends up as a source of concentrated sugar with other nutrients and fibre. It is the high sugar content that helps dry this fruit without fermentation. Because of the high sugar content, eat three or four prunes twice or thrice a week, but not every day.

MORE HONEST TO GOODNESS BENEFITS

Prunes are also rich in:

- Iron and can help prevent iron deficiency. One half-cup of prunes contains 0.81 milligrams of iron. The average adult needs 10 milligrams a day, while menstruating or nursing women need 15 milligrams, and pregnant women need 30 milligrams.
- Antioxidants (polyphenols), lutein, cryptoxanthin, chlorogenic acid, coumaric acid that prevent cell mutation and reduce cancer cell formation.
- Potassium, an essential mineral that helps to maintain a healthy blood pressure level.
- Vitamin A which promotes good vision and prevents macular degeneration and cataracts.

Prunes can be eaten on their own or added to oats cereal, yoghurts, salads (see recipe on Page 16), baked goods, and even smoothies and stews. Take note that a serving size of six prunes (or 57 grams) that are dried but uncooked have 137 calories and 21.7 grams of sugar. Storing prunes in the refrigerator will extend their freshness, allowing them to keep for about six months.

About the author: Kohila Govindaraju is an accredited nutritionist and director of THE BERRIES Nutrition Consulting, an avid blogger (kohilag.wordpress.com) and prolific author of magazine articles on food and nutrition, including a book titled How to Lose Weight Without Hunger published by PatientsEngage.