

# Jackfruit Packs a Walloping Amount of Nutrition

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✓ Fact Checked

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Good nutrition is foundational to optimal health and jackfruit may be one way to boost your nutrition in cooked foods, raw fruit and added to healthy desserts. One cup has protein, fat, fiber, magnesium, potassium and vitamin C
- › These nutrients and more provide jackfruit with antioxidant, anticancer and antiaging properties. The fiber content varies depending on the maturity of the fruit; immature fruit have a 2.6% fiber content, while ripe fruit fiber content has approximately 0.8%
- › Jackfruit has a low glycemic index and helps control high blood sugar. The high fiber content also helps lower the risk of colon cancer, as do high levels of phytonutrients that researchers believe may be one key to treating colon cancer and improving digestive health
- › Potassium in jackfruit helps balance the sodium-to-potassium ratio, which in turn helps normalize blood pressure and reduces the risk of stroke, heart failure and heart attack; the antioxidants, including vitamin C, help promote wound healing and healthy skin and hair
- › Jackfruit is a natural source of latex; people who have an allergy to birch, or a sensitivity or allergy to latex should avoid the fruit as they can experience a cross-reaction

Good nutrition is foundational to optimal health, the importance of which cannot be overstated. The CDC<sup>1</sup> says it “is essential in keeping current and future generations of Americans healthy across the lifespan,” and that “poor nutrition is making our nation

sick.” Penn State quotes nutritionist Victor Lindlahr, who wrote in 1923, “Ninety percent of the diseases known to man are caused by cheap foodstuffs. You are what you eat.”<sup>2</sup>

Research data have shown that ultraprocessed food increases all-cause mortality<sup>3</sup> and the development and progression of chronic disease.<sup>4</sup> In other words, processed food is poor nutrition that is making you sick. Since the future of processed food manufacturing is predicated on consumers increasing ultraprocessed food consumption, not decreasing it, the aim of advertising campaigns is to entice you to fill your grocery cart with junk food.

One way they do this is to put their products in packaging that makes you want to grab them off the shelf without thinking about how good – or not – they are for you. But when you fall prey to that PR, you’re only increasing your risk of premature death and chronic disease. I believe your health and wellness are built on eating whole foods packed with vitamins and nutrients that support mitochondrial health.

The thing is, the most nutritious foods sometimes come in odd-looking packaging. For instance, jackfruit (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*) is the largest fruit in the world that can weigh as much as 40 pounds (18 kilograms).<sup>5</sup> It’s an ugly yellow-green with rough, knotty skin, but it packs a wallop amount of nutritious health benefits.

## **What Is Jackfruit?**

The jackfruit tree is an evergreen native to tropical Asia. It’s considered a staple in areas of Southeast Asia where it’s been eaten for hundreds of years. More recently, it’s showing up as a meat substitute on menus around the world.<sup>6</sup> As mentioned, the exterior of a jackfruit can be either green or yellow and has a hard bumpy skin the plant uses to protect itself from predators.

The meat of the jackfruit resides in fleshy yellow bulbs, each of which holds an edible seed. The texture and flavor of the jackfruit are dependent on whether the fruit is ripe or unripe. The unripe fruit has a bland taste that picks up whatever flavor it’s cooked with. Ripe jackfruit has a fruity flavor with a dense texture.

Traditionally, ripe fruit is used in a variety of ways, including cooked in stews, eaten raw, or added to desserts. It can be purchased fresh in many grocery stores in the late fall. However, to get the widest range of jackfruit products, you may want to visit your local Asian grocery store. You also can purchase canned and dried jackfruit online.

## **Nutritional Value in Jackfruit**

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture,<sup>7</sup> 1 cup of 1-inch pieces of jackfruit contains 143 calories, protein, fat and fiber. The fruit also has magnesium, potassium, vitamin C, folate, lutein and zeaxanthin. A 2019 study<sup>8</sup> showed that jackfruit contains lignans, isoflavones and other phytonutrients with wide-ranging health benefits, including protection against cancer, degenerative diseases and aging.<sup>9</sup>

This means that eating jackfruit can help protect your body against cancer formation, slow the degeneration of cells that causes visible signs of aging and help normalize blood pressure. Jackfruit has a unique taste and can be very versatile. According to BBC Good Food:<sup>10</sup>

*“The seeds and flesh of the fruit may be boiled and eaten in dishes like curries; when fully ripened the fruit can be enjoyed raw and used in both sweet and savory dishes.*

*With a subtle sweetness, the popularity of jackfruit is partly because of its stringy flesh, the texture of which makes it a great meat substitute in vegan versions of classic recipes like pulled pork or chicken.”*

Although jackfruit is safe for most people, if you have a birch allergy or latex sensitivity or allergy, you should avoid it as it may trigger a cross-reaction. Although rare,<sup>11</sup> an anaphylactic reaction has been reported.

## **Jackfruit Has Several Health Benefits**

Despite the fruit's popularity in Thailand, Australia, Brazil and other countries, it's still relatively unknown in the Western world. Below are several of the health benefits researchers have identified that can help you attain and maintain optimal health, provided the fruit is safe for you to eat.

**Digestion** — The fiber content of jackfruit varies depending on the maturity of the fruit. Immature fruit can have a fiber content of 2.6% while the fiber content in ripe fruit is approximately 0.8%.<sup>12</sup> Researchers have also found slight variations depending on the variety of the jackfruit. This fiber acts as a bulk laxative that helps prevent constipation.

As beneficial bacteria in the gut microbiome digest the fiber, they produce metabolites that help protect gut wall integrity, such as short-chain fatty acids. A review of 185 observational studies<sup>13</sup> published in *The Lancet* revealed that people who make a habit of eating high amounts of dietary fiber were 15% to 30% less likely to die prematurely from any cause when compared to people who included the least amount of fiber.

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**Lowers high blood sugar** — Jackfruit has a low glycemic index. This is a rating scale that assigns a value to food based on how quickly and how high the food triggers an increase in blood glucose levels. Foods that have a low glycemic index trigger a lower blood sugar spike and foods high in fiber tend to help control blood sugar by slowing digestion.

A 1991 study<sup>14</sup> showed the extract from the jackfruit tree leaves and from the whole plant could improve glucose tolerance in participants who were diabetic and who had normal glucose control. A 2016 study<sup>15</sup> showed that the bark of the jackfruit tree may prevent complex carbohydrates from breaking down into sugar.

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**Lowers risk of colon cancer** — Colon cancer starts in the colon, but can metastasize throughout the body. Many cancers start as polyps that become malignant over time. According to the American Cancer Society,<sup>16</sup> excluding the different forms of skin

cancer, colorectal cancer is the third most common type of cancer in men and women.

The lifetime risk of developing colorectal cancer, found in the colon and rectum, is about 1 in 23 for men and 1 in 26 for women. A 2019 meta-analysis<sup>17</sup> published in The Lancet suggested a 15% to 30% decrease in colorectal cancer in people who ate the highest amount of dietary fiber when compared to those who ate the lowest.

Jackfruit has more to offer in the fight against colon cancer than fiber. A 2021 study<sup>18</sup> suggested that jackfruit might be “the key to treating colon cancer and improved digestive health” and that the insoluble fiber in the fruit “functions as a bottle brush to rinse and purify the intestines to prohibit colon cancer.”

The study also suggested that the “copious phytonutrients” in the fruit contribute to the anticancer and “chemoprotective properties that minimize mutagenicity of Aflatoxin B1 and proliferation of cancer cells.”

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**Improves heart health** — Jackfruit is potassium-rich, which helps promote a healthy potassium-to-sodium balance and therefore helps relax the arterial walls and normalize your blood pressure. Potassium is a naturally occurring mineral that is vital for normal functioning. Diarrhea, vomiting, sweating, poor dietary choices and some medications can deplete or disrupt your potassium balance.

Research<sup>19</sup> has found that women who consumed the most potassium had a lower risk of all strokes, ischemic stroke and all-cause mortality. An imbalance in sodium and potassium can contribute to high blood pressure, which increases your risk of stroke, heart failure and heart attack.

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**Promotes healthy skin and hair** — Jackfruit seeds are also rich in vitamins, minerals, protein and iron. The antioxidants can help promote healthy skin and have antiaging properties.<sup>20</sup> Grind the seeds in cold milk to get a paste and apply this to your face once or twice a day.

A similarly prepared hair mask can promote hair growth and help prevent premature graying. First, soak the jackfruit seeds in milk and then grind them into a paste. Apply it to your hair for 30 minutes and rinse.

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**Promotes wound healing** – The extract from jackfruit tree leaves has tested well in an animal wound healing model when compared to Betadine. The period of epithelialization (wound healing) in the group using the leaf extract was higher than in the control group.<sup>21</sup> The fruit is also high in vitamin C, which is critical to wound healing and promotes collagen production.

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## Cleaning and Cooking Jackfruit

Although highly nutritious, it takes some effort to part the fruit from the shell as is demonstrated in this short video. As you'll see, coating your hands and utensils with coconut oil helps keep the latex from sticking to your hands. It bears repeating that if you have a latex or birch allergy, you should avoid jackfruit as you can experience a cross-reaction. Those with a latex sensitivity should also take care to limit further exposure to latex.

If you are looking for a meat alternative, jackfruit is an excellent choice. A quick online search reveals several recipes to help you get started incorporating jackfruit in your menu planning, including those that incorporate the fruit both cooked and raw. A variety of industries have found uses for jackfruit trees, including as fuel, timber, medicinal extracts and shade for other crops, such as coffee and pepper.

The seeds are high in lectins, which have been linked to autoimmune reactions and inflammation, and have been identified as possible toxins to your cells and nerves. So, if you are dealing with an autoimmune disease, you will need to be especially careful with lectin, and you may benefit from a lectin-restricted diet. That said, it is nearly impossible to avoid lectins 100% of the time.

I do not recommend a [lectin-free diet](#) simply because you'd miss out on antioxidants and other nutrients in lectin-containing foods, including many otherwise nutritious

vegetables. A better approach is to consume lectins occasionally and pay attention to how they affect you. Soak jackfruit seeds and cook in the same way you would beans to help neutralize the lectins.

- Soak the beans in water for at least 12 hours before cooking, changing the water frequently. Add baking soda to the soaking water to further neutralize the lectins.<sup>22</sup>
- Discard the soaking water and rinse the beans.
- Cook for at least 15 minutes on high heat or use a pressure cooker.

## Sources and References

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- <sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Why It Matters](#)
- <sup>2</sup> Penn State, [Why Is Nutrition Important to Health?](#)
- <sup>3</sup> [BMJ, 2019;365](#)
- <sup>4</sup> [Nutrition Research, 2021;95](#)
- <sup>5</sup> [Britannica, Jackfruit](#)
- <sup>6</sup> [Bon Appetit, April 8, 2022](#)
- <sup>7</sup> [USDA, Jackfruit, Raw](#)
- <sup>8</sup> [International Journal of Food Science, 2019;2019 Section 1.13](#)
- <sup>9</sup> [Nutritional Composition of Fruit Cultivars, 2016; doi: 10.1016/B978-0-12-408117-8.00014-3 Abstract](#)
- <sup>10</sup> [BBC Good Food, The Top Five Health Benefits of Jackfruit](#)
- <sup>11</sup> [Allergy and Rhinology, 2021; 12](#)
- <sup>12</sup> [International Journal of Food Science, 2019;2019 Section 1.9](#)
- <sup>13, 17</sup> [The Lancet, January 10, 2019](#)
- <sup>14</sup> [Journal of Ethnopharmacology, 1991; 31\(3\)](#)
- <sup>15</sup> [Journal of Acute Disease, 2016; 5\(5\)](#)
- <sup>16</sup> [American Cancer Society, Key Statistics for Colorectal Cancer](#)
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- <sup>19</sup> [Stroke, 2014;45\(10\)](#)
- <sup>20</sup> [StyleCraze, March 13, 2023](#)
- <sup>21</sup> [Ancient Science of Life, 2009; 28 \(4\)](#)
- <sup>22</sup> [Precision Nutrition, All About Lectins](#)