

Chestnuts

Chestnuts are quite different from other nuts nutritionally and in a culinary sense. They have a sweet, nutty taste but a texture similar to a firm baked potato rather than the crunchy texture of other nuts. Nutritionally **chestnuts** are more like a wholegrain than a nut as they are low in fat, contain protein and are a good source of low glycemic index (GI) carbohydrate and dietary fibre. While they are a source of the same vitamins and minerals found in other nuts, their high water content means the concentration of these nutrients is less. **Chestnut** season is from mid March to June and they are generally sold fresh, frozen or ground as chestnut meal. A standard serve of **chestnuts** is equivalent to about 30g or around four **chestnuts**.



Nutrition and health benefits of chestnuts

Like other nuts, chestnuts have a number of health benefits, making them a worthwhile addition to your diet:

- **A good source of low GI carbohydrate** – chestnut meal has been GI tested with a low GI value of 54.¹ While whole chestnuts have yet to be tested we can assume since the ground chestnut meal is low GI, whole chestnuts will also be low GI. In general the finer the particles being tested the higher the GI. Low GI chestnuts are a good choice for people with diabetes, impaired glucose

tolerance and insulin resistance. They make a great tasty alternative to high GI potatoes.

- **Gluten-free** – while all nuts are gluten-free, chestnuts can be ground into a meal which is a great replacement in baked products for those with Coeliac disease or gluten intolerance. Coeliac disease is a condition that requires a lifelong change to diet removing all sources of gluten. Chestnut and other nut meals as ingredients help provide variety to these diets. Since gluten free diets are more likely to have a high GI, nuts in general help lower the GI of these diets.
- **A source of dietary fibre** – roasted chestnuts provide around 2g of fibre per 30g serve^{2,3} or a similar amount as in a slice of wholegrain bread. Particularly important for those with Coeliac disease who often don't get enough fibre in the diet.
- **Low in total fat and saturated fat** – unlike other nuts, chestnuts contain less than 1g of total fat per 100g, making them a tasty addition to a healthy, balanced low in saturated fat diet.³
- **Rich source of vitamin C** – chestnuts are the only “nuts” that contain vitamin C with about 12mg in a 30g serve of raw product or 25% of the RDI for vitamin C. The amount of vitamin C decreases by a third however after heating.⁶
- **Very low in sodium and contains potassium**, similar to other nuts.³ A low sodium, high potassium diet has benefits for blood pressure and heart health.⁴

Buying and storage tips

When buying chestnuts, look for even-sized nuts which feel heavy for their size, with undamaged, firm shells. Due to their high moisture content (they are almost 50% water) chestnuts can dry out easily. If storing them for more than a day or two, place in a plastic bag to help retain their moisture. They should be stored as near as possible to 0°C. With proper storage chestnuts can remain in good condition for a few weeks.

How to prepare and cook chestnuts⁵

If you have never had the pleasure of eating “roasted chestnuts from an open fire” it's time you tried them.

Top tip

Before cooking, the most important step is to cut the shell to prevent the nut exploding while cooking. Some people cut a slit across the face of the nut, others cut a cross into the flat-end.

To bake: Preheat oven to 200°C. Place chestnuts onto a baking tray and bake for 15–20 minutes or until shell split opens.

To microwave: Place chestnuts in a single layer on a microwave-safe plate. Cook, uncovered, on 850 watts/High/100% for 4–6 minutes or until flesh is tender.

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Nutritional analysis of roasted chestnuts³

| Nutrient | Per 100g |
|--------------------------|----------|
| Energy (kJ) | 732 |
| Protein (g) | 3.4 |
| Fat, total (g) | 0.6 |
| Fat, saturated (g) | n/a |
| Fat, monounsaturated (g) | n/a |
| Fat, polyunsaturated (g) | n/a |
| Carbohydrate, total (g) | 34.3 |
| Carbohydrate, sugars (g) | 3.8 |
| Dietary fibre (g) | 8.1 |
| Sodium (mg) | 0.7 |
| Potassium (mg) | 574 |
| Magnesium (mg) | 33 |
| Calcium (mg) | 13 |
| Phosphorus (mg) | 48 |
| Iron (mg) | 0.8 |
| Zinc (mg) | 0.5 |
| Copper (mg) | 0.5 |
| Manganese (mg) | 1.2 |
| Folate (ug) | 70 |
| Vitamin C ⁶ | 26 |

For further information on the nutritional benefits of nuts visit

www.nutsforlife.com.au or for specific information on chestnuts go to www.chestnutsaustralia.com.au

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To roast, grill or barbeque: Cook, turning occasionally, in a pan over medium heat for 20–30 minutes or until shell split opens

To boil (if using to puree): Place chestnuts into a pan of cold water, bring to the boil, cover and simmer for 15–20 minutes or until flesh is tender.

Wrap the cooked chestnuts in a tea-towel for 10 minutes to provide steam which helps with the peeling process. Then remove outer shell and inner skin while still warm (they're tricky to peel once cooled).

Tofu stir fry with oyster sauce and chestnuts

½ cup whole roasted chestnuts
2 teaspoons canola oil
2 cloves garlic, crushed
2 teaspoons finely shredded ginger
2 tablespoon water
250g Asian greens such as bok choy, cut into 10cm lengths
¼ cup hoisin sauce
2 x 300g packs silken firm tofu, drained and sliced
4 cups rice vermicelli or fresh noodles, cooked

Roast the chestnuts for 15 minutes then drain and remove outer skins. Set aside.

Heat the oil in a wok or large non stick frying pan over medium high heat. Add the garlic, ginger and chestnuts and cook for 1 minute before adding 2 tablespoons water and the Asian greens. Stir fry until just wilted then add the hoisin sauce. Cook for another minute, add the tofu and gently continue to stir fry until the tofu is warmed through. Serve immediately with rice or noodles.

SERVES 4

Nutrient content per serve

Energy 2230kJ (530kcal), Protein 25g, Total fat 15g, Saturated fat 2g (13% of total fat), Monounsaturated fat 4g, Polyunsaturated fat 7g, Carbohydrates 7g, Fibre 9g, Sodium 320mg
~20g nuts per serve

8 ways to include chestnuts in your diet

- Enjoy freshly roasted chestnuts over the fire as the perfect winter pre-dinner snack.
- Use roasted chestnuts in place of potato at evening meals.
- Add them to your favourite pumpkin soup recipe for a tasty change.
- Whole or chopped chestnuts make a tasty addition to your favourite stir-fry.
- Use ground chestnuts in place of flour to make wheat or gluten-free cakes.
- Combine with onion, garlic, your favourite herbs, fresh breadcrumbs and an egg to make a stuffing for your Sunday roast.
- Pureed chestnuts make a tasty soufflé.
- Add roasted chestnuts to mushroom risotto.

References

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4. Blumenthal JA et al. Effects of the DASH diet alone and in combination with exercise and weight loss on blood pressure and cardiovascular biomarkers in men and women with high blood pressure: the ENCORE study. *Arch Intern Med*. 2010;170(2):126–35.
5. Chestnut Growers Australia website www.chestnutsaustralia.com.au cited 26th June 2010.
6. USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference release 23 (2010) cited June 2010.

