



# Nutrition Nuggets: The Magic of Mushrooms

by Delisa Renideo



We've often heard that we should eat brightly colored foods because they are more nutritious, right? Well, that IS right -- but as with most guidelines, there are some exceptions. In this case, the exception is mushrooms. Mushrooms? Yes, read on.

Mushrooms provide us not only with protein and fiber, but also antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits. They strengthen our immune system, reduce cholesterol and triglycerides, and help prevent cancer. Not only that, they can help combat auto-immune disorders. Wow! All this from the humble mushroom?

Now I'll get a bit technical. The first line of defense in our immune system is our white blood cells. One special type of white blood cell is called an NK cell, or natural killer cell, which detects cells that have been infected or damaged in some way and attacks and kills them. These are good guys to have working for us! Mushrooms enhance the activity of these NK cells.

Another type of white blood cell is called a dendritic cell. These are experts at teamwork. They identify and capture the bad guys and turn them over to a different type of immune cell to be destroyed. Dendritic cell functioning typically declines with age, leading to a less effective immune system. But eating mushrooms can prevent this age-related immune system decline. I'll go for that!



## Edible Mushrooms

**Mushrooms help prevent tumors from getting the supply of blood they need to grow.**

Having a stronger immune system definitely reduces our risk of cancer, because our immune system recognizes cancer cells as bad guys and gets rid of them. But mushrooms help fight cancer in another, very interesting, way. Let's suppose you have a tumor starting to grow somewhere in your body. In order to grow, it needs a blood supply to feed it, right? Without an increasing supply of blood, it can't grow. The process of creating new blood cells is called angiogenesis.

Now get this -- mushrooms contain an angiogenesis inhibitor! In other words, it helps prevent the tumor from getting the supply of blood it needs to grow.



Tumors aren't the only unwanted thing that needs a blood supply. Can you think of a 3-letter word that most of us don't want more of? FAT! When we gain 10 pounds of fat, that extra fat has to have a blood supply. Here we are back to angiogenesis. And here again, mushrooms can help us by inhibiting the growth of fat cells by inhibiting the process of expanding our blood supply into the fat cells. (Don't worry -- mushrooms just help inhibit

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excessive angiogenesis. We'll still have all the blood supply we need.)

Mushrooms help prevent breast cancer in yet another way. How does it work? Mushrooms contain something called "aromatase inhibitors" that help reduce the level of estrogen and prevent estrogen from stimulating breast tissue. This in turn reduces

the risk of breast cancer. In fact, frequent mushroom consumption can decrease the incidence of breast cancer by up to 60 to 70 percent! And combining mushrooms with greens increases this effect even more.

Mushrooms are certainly not the only food that provides these amazing benefits, but I think they are probably the least appreciated for their health promoting qualities. Until now, that is!

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