

# Health Benefits of Okra



Okra is a popular fruit, a pod with small edible seeds, also referred to as a vegetable. Sometimes called *Lady's Fingers*, okra's mild flavor is similar to eggplant or green beans. It is low in calories, rich in antioxidants and a good source of dietary fiber.

Thought to originate from Southern Asia, Ethiopia or West Africa, the plant may have been brought to the Americas on African slave ships. It is a food staple of the Southern US states fried or in gumbo.

## WHAT MAKES OKRA GREAT?

### Nutrition

1 cup raw okra provides 33 Calories, 2 gm protein, 3 gm fiber, no fat and no cholesterol.

### Vitamins

Okra contains several anti-inflammatory antioxidants including vitamins C and K, beta-carotene, oxalic acid, catechins, quercetin and flavonoids which boost immunity, neutralize free radicals and reduce risk of chronic disease.

Folate, a B vitamin, helps prevent birth defects, supports DNA and protects against development of breast cancer. Okra also contains lectin, a type of protein, that may help reduce the growth of cancer cells.

### Minerals

Okra contains iron for oxygen transport, calcium for strong bones, teeth, and muscle contraction. Magnesium and potassium in okra work to lower blood pressure and maintain normal heart rhythm. Magnesium also helps regulate blood glucose, contributes to nerve impulse conduction and bone health.

### Fat

Because okra has less than one half gram of fat per serving, it can claim fat free. However, the small amount of fat in okra, located in the seeds, contains linoleic acid oil, one of the essential fatty acids, and oleic acid. Both are unsaturated fats associated with lower cholesterol, and reduced risk for heart disease and cancer.

### Fiber

Okra can sometimes take on a slimy texture. This is because it is rich in soluble fiber, which is partially dissolved in water. For comparison, other foods that contain soluble fiber include oatmeal and the gel in the bottom of a can of beans. Soluble fiber can reduce inflammation, lower cholesterol, and contribute to feelings of fullness which is important for weight management.

Soluble fiber also acts as food for our healthy gut bacteria who consume fiber and convert it to healthy compounds like short-chain-fatty-acids, which boost immunity and contribute to brain health.

## BUYING & USING OKRA

Because it is a warm climate food, okra is mostly available in the summer months. Fresh okra should be firm but not hard, with bright green pods. It can also be found frozen.

Rinse and pat dry before cooking. Cut or slice lengthwise or diagonally, or leave whole. Okra is crunchy when cooked quickly, but softens when slow-cooked for soups or gumbo. Because it is high in soluble fiber, it acts as a natural soup thickener.

Some sources recommend cooking okra with an acidic food, like tomatoes, to reduce the chance of becoming slimy.

Young okra greens are also edible and can be consumed raw or cooked. Roasted okra seeds have been used as a caffeine-free substitute for coffee.



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Okra can be used in soups and stews, roasted as a side dish, pickled or sliced raw in salads. Try crunching raw with hummus or dip. In some regions, okra is breaded and deep fried.

### Garlic Roasted Okra

Adapted from [eatsomethingvegan.com](http://eatsomethingvegan.com)

#### Ingredients:

- 1 pound okra
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp sea salt
- 1 1/2 Tbsp margarine or oil

#### Instructions:

1. Rinse okra and dry with paper towel. Trim stem ends and cut into 1/2" pieces. Place in a medium bowl.
2. In a small bowl, mix together spices. Sprinkle over okra and add melted margarine or oil. Mix well.
3. Transfer to large, parchment-lined baking sheet and spread evenly.
4. Bake 450°F for 15 minutes.
5. Store unused roasted okra in airtight container in the refrigerator about 3 days.

### Okra Lentil Gumbo

[Elavegan.com](http://Elavegan.com)

#### Ingredients:

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1 onion, chopped                      | 1 tsp dried oregano                                 |
| 1 stalk celery, chopped               | 1 tsp brown sugar                                   |
| 1 red pepper, chopped                 | 3/4 tsp cumin                                       |
| 2 cloves garlic minced                | 3/4 tsp turmeric                                    |
| 1 cup dry lentils                     | 1/2 tsp coriander                                   |
| 14 oz can crushed tomatoes            | 1/4 tsp red pepper flakes                           |
| 3 cups vegetable broth                | 1/2 tsp smoked paprika                              |
| 1 1/2 cups okra, chopped              | 2 bay leaves  |
| 1 15 oz can cannellini or other beans | 1 tsp cornstarch with 2 Tbsp plant-based milk (opt) |
| 1 Tbsp balsamic vinegar               |   |
| 2 Tbsp soy sauce                      |   |

#### Instructions:

1. Sauté onion, celery and pepper over medium heat until onions are translucent, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and sauté 2 minutes more.
2. Add dry spices, lentils and broth and bring to boil. Lower heat and simmer with lid about 15 minutes.
3. Then add crushed tomatoes, okra and stir. Simmer with lid another 10-15 minutes.
4. When done, add soy sauce, vinegar and canned beans. Add cornstarch and milk to thicken if desired.
5. Serve with rice, potatoes, noodles or artisan bread.

### Oven-baked Okra Bites

[Thehealthyfamilyandhome.com](http://Thehealthyfamilyandhome.com)

#### Ingredients:

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|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 12 pods okra, sliced into 1/2" pieces | Bread crumbs:             | 1/4 tsp garlic powder  |
| 2 Tbsp avocado oil                    | 1/4 cup almond flour      | 1/4 tsp cayenne pepper |
|                                       | 1/4 cup nutritional yeast | 1/4 tsp pink salt      |

#### Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 425°F. Line cookie sheet with parchment paper and set aside.
2. Mix bread crumb ingredients in small bowl. Cut both ends off okra, slice and transfer to medium bowl.
3. Drizzle okra with 1 Tbsp oil and toss until evenly distributed. Add half bread crumb mixture and toss. Add remaining oil and toss, then add rest of the bread crumb mixture and toss, being gently not to lose crumb.
4. Transfer to prepared cookie sheet and bake at 425°F for 10 minutes. Flip each piece and bake additional 10 minutes until golden brown. Serve hot alone or with favorite dipping sauce.

## REFERENCES

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