Pumpkins are not just for carving
By: Dr. Alyssa Musgrove

Chances are, if someone mentions pumpkins, your first thought will be pie at Thanksgiving or carving jack-o-lanterns. But pumpkins are also a wonderful, nutrient-dense ingredient that can be added to soups, salads, casseroles, breads and even dog treats!

Pumpkins belong to the cucumber family and are related to cantaloupes. They come in large and small varieties, as well as different colors and shapes. Pumpkins pack a significant nutritional punch by providing a healthy dose of vitamin C, potassium, copper and manganese. The bright orange color of most pumpkins is caused by high levels of beta-carotene. Beta-carotene is a plant carotenoid that converts to vitamin A in the body. Carotenoids act as an antioxidant in the body by tackling harmful free radicals and stimulate the immune system to work properly. Pumpkins also provide vitamin E, thiamin, niacin, B6, folate, iron, magnesium and phosphorus. All combined, these vitamins and minerals have a dramatic effect on your health. One cup of cooked pumpkin contains more potassium than a banana!

The seeds from pumpkins are also a concentrated source of minerals, vitamins, protein and fiber. Pumpkin seeds contain the amino acid tryptophan, which relaxes the body, calms nerves and improves sleep. Roasted pumpkin seeds are an easy, transportable snack. To roast pumpkin seeds, wash them thoroughly in cold water after extracting them from the pumpkin. Spread them out in a single layer on a baking sheet and bake at 225 degrees for about 45 minutes, stirring occasionally. Adding a sprinkle of natural salt helps bring out their nutty flavor.

When buying pumpkins to cook with, be sure to find one that is fully ripe. You can check this by tapping on the outside. Your tap should produce a dense, hollow “thump.” Pass on pumpkins that have cuts, wrinkled surface skin, or blemishes. Store your pumpkin in a cool, dry place and it should be good for several weeks.

Slow Cooker Pumpkin Coffeecake Oatmeal is a healthy way to get your pumpkin fix this fall. This oatmeal has a healthy steel-cut oat base. The sweetness comes from the topping, but you can always add some extra sweetener or a splash of vanilla nondairy milk to make it a little sweeter. (This recipe uses a smaller slow cooker – 1 ½ to 2 quarts. If making in a larger slow cooker, double or triple the recipe to prevent burning.)

**Slow Cooker Pumpkin Coffeecake Oatmeal**

*Recipe courtesy of HealthySlowCooking.com***Ingredients**:
• ½ cup (40g) steel-cut oats
• 1¾ cup (437ml) Unsweetened Vanilla Almond Milk (or plain plus ½ teaspoon vanilla extract)
• ½ cup (124g) pumpkin
• ½ teaspoon cinnamon
*Coffeecake Topping*
• 3 tablespoons brown sugar (or other sweetener if you don't use refined sugar)
• 3 tablespoons pecans or walnuts, chopped
• ½ teaspoon cinnamon **Directions:**
*The night before:*
Mix toppings in a small container and cover until the morning. Spray your crock with some oil to help with clean up later (optional). Add all the ingredients except the toppings. Cook on low overnight (7 to 9 hours).
*In the morning:*
Stir your oatmeal well. It may seem watery at the top but if stirred it should be a more uniform consistency. Top with coffee cake topping.

*Pathways to Healing specializes in holistic chiropractic care. Dr. Alyssa Musgrove draws on a variety of techniques, including chiropractic, kinesiology, nutrition, food allergy testing and lifestyle counseling to assist clients in achieving optimal health and wellness in one setting. In addition, the practice is committed to being a valuable source of information so that people can learn how to live a healthy lifestyle and prevent future illness. Pathways to Healing is located at 1022 Founders Row, Lake Oconee Village, Greensboro. The office can be reached at 706-454-2040.*