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.

This Pumpkin Cauliflower Soup is a healthy way to get your pumpkin fix this fall. The soup is vegetarian and vegan friendly, hearty and comforting, and the ginger gives it a little zing!

**Pumpkin and Cauliflower Soup with Ginger***Ingredients:*-1 medium onion, diced
-2 stalks of celery, chopped
-1 large carrot, chopped
-2 tablespoons ginger, finely chopped
-3 cloves garlic, minced
-2 (10 ounce) cans vegetable or chicken broth
-1 (27 ounce) can pumpkin purée
-1 cup water
-1/4 teaspoon dried thyme
-1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
-salt and pepper to taste
-1 head cauliflower
**Directions:**1. Sauté onion, celery, and carrot in large pot on medium heat for 5-7 minutes.
2. Add the ginger and garlic to the pot and stir until fragrant. Add the vegetable broth, pumpkin purée, water, thyme, cumin, salt and pepper. Add the cauliflower (can use your hands to break it down into smaller florets).
3. With a lid slightly ajar, simmer the soup on medium-low heat for about 30 minutes or until vegetable have softened.
4. Purée the soup using a blender.
5. The soup will be thick, you can add water to thin it out and enjoy!

The next time you are enjoying a pumpkin-flavored treat, save a cup of plain pumpkin puree and whip up these easy homemade pumpkin dog treats for your tail wagging friends. The recipe below is a good starting place for creating your own recipes based on what you have on hand and what flavors your dog likes. For example, you can try replacing the canned pumpkin with mashed sweet potato. Resist adding spices or sweeteners, as some are actually dangerous to dogs (cinnamon and xylitol are two big no-no’s).

**Homemade Pumpkin Dog Treats***Ingredients:*-1 ½ cups almond flour
-1/2 cup coconut flour
-1 cup canned pumpkin (plain)
-water or broth, as needed**Directions:**1. Preheat oven to 225 degrees F.
2. Line two cookie sheets with parchment paper
3. Combine first three ingredients in a bowl and mix well.
4. Squeeze a handful and if it holds together in a ball you are good to go. If it crumbles add water or broth a little at a time until it does hold together when squeezed in your hand.
5. Roll or pat the dough to make a slab, about a quarter inch thick. You can place the dough between two sheets of waxed paper to keep it from sticking to your hands or rolling pin.
6. Cut the dough into shapes: squares or rectangles are the quickest. Can use a small drinking glass to cut circles.
7. Carefully place each shape onto the cookie sheet, these treats do not spread as they bake, so they can almost be touching each other.
8. If you like you can use a dull knife to press and “X” about 1/16th of an inch into the top of each biscuit to make it easy to snap it into tiny bits for training-reward treats or for smaller dogs.
9. Bake for 50 minutes or a little less depending on when the edges start turning dark.
10. Remove from the oven and let the biscuits cool on the baking pans.
11. Store the cooled finished dog biscuits in an airtight jar.

*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.*