**10 Important Health Benefits of Yams**

The yam, commonly referred to as wild yam, has been feeding the people of Africa and Asia since 50,000 BC. They are also used for their medicinal properties. It is important to note that in the United States, what is called a yam is a variety of sweet potato. Real yams can be found in some health food and Asian markets.

To clarify, the sweet potato is from the plant family convolvulaceae and the yam is from the plant family dioscoreaceae; they are not even closely related. Mexican yams, sold as jicama should not be confused with a true yam either. While sweet potatoes have their own nutritional value and health benefits, this article will be discussing the benefits of the true yam. Be sure you are buying a true yam if you are looking for the benefits they have to offer.

* **Cardiovascular Benefits**

Yams are a very good source of B vitamins, especially high in B6. The B vitamins break down artery-damaging homocysteine. High levels of homocysteine in the blood may cause a heart attack or stroke in people who have normal cholesterol levels. Breaking down and removing it from your system will lower your risk for both of these life-threatening situations. The potassium content of yams will help keep your blood pressure under control; further reducing your chances for heart attack and stroke.

* **Control of Blood Sugar for Diabetics**

Being complex carbohydrates, yams break down into sugar more slowly than a simple carbohydrate. The sugar is released into the blood stream gradually over time, keeping sugar levels from going to high while keeping a steady supply to keep it from dipping too low. The manganese content contributes to this and to the production of energy during the process; keeping your body from becoming sluggish. If you are pre-diabetic, yams can help you to lose a bit of weight and regulate your blood sugar, keeping you from becoming diabetic and needing medication for it.

* **Weight Control**

As mentioned above, yams keep a steady supply of sugar to the blood stream. This will keep you from becoming too hungry or craving something sweet to eat. The high fiber in yams keep things moving through your digestive system, keeping them from sitting in one place too long and turning into stored fat. Fiber also makes you feel full so you will not want or need to eat as much.

* **Hormonal Balance, Menopause and Fertility**

Yams contain diosgenins which aid in lessening the symptoms of menopause. They are able to help with the production of progesterone and estrogen, keeping your hormones in balance and preventing osteoporosis, breast cancer, mood swings and depression. The B6 helps in this area as well. Eating yams will also regulate your menstrual cycle, making becoming pregnant easier.

* **Digestive Health**

The fiber and starch content in yams will prevent constipation without causing diarrhea. It is also beneficial to people with ulcers or irritable bowel syndrome. They have been used for centuries for colic and upset stomachs.

* **Anti-inflammatory Agent**

Having yams in your diet will help stabilize your ant-inflammatory hormones, relieving joint pain caused by arthritis or other inflammations. Wild yam ointment is used for joint inflammation and to reduce the pain of bruises.

* **Respiratory Relief**

The combination of being mildly diaphoretic and anti-inflammatory means yams reduce asthma attacks and reduce the risk of respiratory problems. Make a drink from the water used to boil a yam and drink it to stop a cough.

* **Cancer Prevention**

As a good source of Vitamin C, yams have an abundance of anti-oxidants. These latch on to any free radicals in your system and prevent them from turning into cancerous cells. Vitamin C is needed for the production of Vitamin E, which is another anti-oxidant, further decreasing your cancer risk.

* **Healthy Skin**

Aiding in the replenishment of collagen, Vitamin C is also vital for a healthy, glowing complexion that does not look old, sallow and saggy. Cutting open a yam and applying the raw end to the skin will help heal abscesses and boils.

* **Nervous System Benefits**

Potassium and manganese allow for proper neurotransmissions. They not only aid in the production of neurotransmitters, but keep the myelin sheath in good repair, allowing the transmitters to connect easier and better. Potassium also aids in muscle contractions or spasms when the nerve paths are clear.

You should never eat a yam raw; it needs to be cooked to make sure any toxins are killed. They can be baked, boiled, fried or roasted. Use them in place of sweet potatoes in casseroles. Wild yam can be bought and used in pill, ointment or raw form. While it may be tempting to use an ointment or a pill for your situation, why not get all the benefits and eat this tuber as it was meant to be. They taste great too.

Wendy Lynn is a RN and freelance nutrition and exercise author currently researching [low carb snacks](http://www.lowcarbfoods.org/) and easy ways to incorporate them into your diet.