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Olives—to Your Health

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Naturopathic Physician

Brown Box Organics not only offers free home or office organic produce and specialized grocery deliveries but also curbside pick up on call-ahead orders.

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Olive Facts

Preparation	Serving Size	Carbs	Fiber (g)	Fat (g)	Energy (kj)
Black Olives	6 medium (40g)	2	2	7	165
Green Olives	6 medium (50g)	2	2	2	125
Stuffed Olives	5 medium (20g)	0.5	1.5	1.5	75

Olives have been enjoyed for at least seven thousand years. Native to the Mediterranean, their popularity quickly spread from Crete to Egypt, Greece, Palestine, and Asia Minor for flavor, usefulness, and olive nutrition. In the 15th and 16th centuries, olives were introduced to America by the Spanish and Portuguese. The olive tree, *Olea europaea*, is today cultivated primarily in Spain, Italy, Greece, and Turkey for both olives and olive oil. California is the only place where they are grown in America.

Olives are in a class of fruits called drupes, along with apricots, peaches, cherries, and plums. A drupe is characterized by a large seed surrounded by fleshy meat. Unlike other drupes they are extremely bitter, so much so that they cannot be eaten directly off the tree. They have to be processed first - usually by soaking or curing in oil, water, salt, or a lye solution.

The range of this interesting fruit goes much further than the traditional black and green olive. They come in a range of colors and flavors, depending on where they were grown and how they were processed. Black olives start out as unripe green olives, which are then cured and oxidized to get their smooth black color and flavor. Green olives are not oxidized, and are slightly saltier than black olives. Aphissa olives are a tender, earthy variety, brown in color. The fruitiest, richest olives are Kalamata olives. These dark purple fruits are harvested when they are fully ripe. Manzanilla olives are small green Spanish olives. They are slightly bitter and smoky in flavor. Picholines come from France. They are green, salty, and slightly creamy.

Health Benefits of Olives

Olives are known, and perhaps avoided, for their high fat content. There is not much focus put on the nutrition in olives. It is true; they are a very good source of oleic acid, a nutritious monounsaturated fat, also called omega-9 fatty acid. Seventy five percent of the olive fruit is oleic acid. Monounsaturated fat is actually required by the body for proper cellular function. It is a key component of cell membranes, as well as other parts within the cell, protecting the mitochondria and the cell's DNA. Also, with its oily consistency, oleic acid helps lower blood cholesterol levels.

The nutritional value of olives also includes a high content of vitamin E. This fat-soluble antioxidant works to prevent free radical damage in fatty areas of the body. It neutralizes free radicals, which are naturally produced by cells during energy production, before they can affect other cells. Olives also have high amounts of polyphenols and flavonoids which also act as antioxidants. The combination of strong antioxidants, with the cellular protection of oleic acid, makes this food a powerful degenerative disease preventing fruit.

Olives also are good sources of iron, copper, and dietary fiber. One cup provides 25% of the daily-recommended amount of iron, 20% of vitamin E, 17% of dietary fiber and 17% of copper.

Adding Olives to Your Diet

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It is simple to add olive nutrition to your diet since this fruit is both versatile and full of flavor. Olives can be mixed into soups, stews, salads and stir-fries. They are also wonderful baked. Use the more delicate varieties such as manzanilla or picholine olives with fish and chicken; try the more robust olives - kalamata and amphissa, for meats or red sauces.

You can also make an olive tapenade by mixing pitted olives, garlic, olive oil, capers, and lemon juice in the blender. Experiment with spices and fresh herbs, or roasted red pepper and then spread on sandwiches, or fresh bread, fish, or lamb.

Olives can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator. Enjoy them knowing the nutritional value of olives. Black and green olives are great, but try other varieties to see which ones you prefer.

Chunky Onion Harissa

¼ cup tomato paste	1 cup olive oil
1 T plus 1 tsp dried crushed red pepper	½ cup red wine vinegar
¾ tsp cayenne pepper	6 chopped green onions
1 small chopped red onion	1 large minced garlic clove

Combine tomato paste, crushed red pepper and cayenne pepper in bowl. Gradually whisk in oil. Whisk in vinegar. Mix in onions and garlic. Season generously with salt and pepper. (Can be prepared eight hours ahead. Let stand at room temperature. Stir harissa well before using.)

Nutritional analysis: Per serving, 131 calories (approx 1 T) 14 g fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 34 mg sodium, 2 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber, 0 g protein.

Orange & Olive Salad

1 tsp. Toasted cumin seed	3 large oranges
¾ cup green olives	½ cup extra virgin olive oil
1 T harissa	one crisp head of lettuce, torn into bite-sized pieces
sea salt to taste	

Toast cumin seeds in a dry skillet, and grind into powder. Zest one of the oranges and set aside. Peel the oranges with a sharp knife, carefully removing all of the pith. Work over a bowl in order to catch the juice from the segments. Mix the oranges and olives together. In a separate bowl, whisk together the oil, harissa and cumin. Add salt to taste and pour the dressing over the oranges and olives –toss together. Arrange the lettuce in a serving bowl. Add the orange and olive mixture, garnish with orange zest and serve.

Nutritional analysis: Per serving (approx 4), 317 calories, 30 grams fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 254 mg sodium, 15 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber, 1 g protein

Fig and Olive Tapenade

1/3 cup green Spanish olives, pitted and halved	2-5 dried figs (soaked)
1/3 cup kalamata olives, pitted and halved	2 T Italian parsley
2 T. capers	1 T garlic, chopped

Place all the ingredients into a food processor and mix until chopped finely. Serve with toasted pitas or crostini.

Nutritional analysis: Per serving (approximately 1 T) 20 calories, 1 g fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 54 mg. Sodium, 3 g carbohydrate, 0 g fiber, 0 g protein

