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Human Nutrition Faculty Explain the Pumpkin Spice Craze

Winthrop University

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Human Nutrition Faculty Explain the Pumpkin Spice Craze

Quick Facts

- Human nutrition faculty agree the craze could be related to the positive feelings of the holidays clustered at the end of the year.



ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA — For many people, the beginning of the fall means one thing: the **return of pumpkin spice-flavored products**. From Starbucks' pumpkin spice latte to pumpkin spice M & Ms, companies flood the shelves all fall with this seasonal thrill.

Some Winthrop University human nutrition faculty weighed in on the craze, agreeing that it could be the seasonal connections that appeal to people.

"Pumpkin spice may be appealing to many people due to its association with 'comfort foods' from holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas," said **Judy Thomas**, instructor. "For people who have pleasant memories of eating pumpkin-containing recipes, the aroma of pumpkin spice may trigger feelings of contentment related to family meals or gatherings of friends."

Instructor **Leslie Thompson** agreed, adding Halloween to the holiday mix. **Department of Human Nutrition Chair Wanda Koszewski** referred to an NPR report, which pointed out that the fall-orange color-pumpkin spice connection "represents our rural roots and a simpler life than what we have now."

Pumpkins are a nutrient-dense power food with all kinds of benefits, including vitamin A—which Thompson said humans need for healthy vision, cell growth and strong immune systems—vitamins B and C, beta carotene, potassium and fiber. With one cup equaling only 30 calories, it won't break your diet, either.

But bad news: most of the pumpkin spice products on the shelves don't provide those benefits.

"Most of the pumpkin products we see probably provide very little, if any, actual pumpkin, so we aren't getting all those nutritional benefits of the actual pumpkin," Thompson said.

Koszewski signs this reality check: a pumpkin spice latte typically contains 420 calories, 18 grams of fat (even though pumpkin has no fat) and 50 grams of sugar.

What are the weirdest pumpkin spice products you've seen?

Koszewski: "I don't really look specifically at pumpkin spice flavors on the shelf, but I think they are making pumpkin-flavored Cheerios and Pringles."

Thomas: "Pumpkin spice body lotion!"

Thompson: "It's hard to say, it's becoming more of the norm to see pumpkin spice cereals, breads, ice cream, yogurt, candy, peanut butter...and the list goes on..."

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