

# No, beetroot isn't vegetable Viagra. But here's what else it can do

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Beetroot has been in the news for all the wrong reasons. Supply issues in recent months have seen a [shortage](#) of tinned beetroot on Australian supermarket shelves. At one point, a tin was reportedly selling on eBay for [more than A\\$65](#).

But as supplies increase, we turn our attention to [beetroot](#)'s apparent health benefits.

Is beetroot really vegetable Viagra, as UK TV doctor Michael Mosley [suggests](#)? What about beetroot's other apparent health benefits—from reducing your [blood pressure](#) to improving your daily workout? Here's what the science says.

## What's so special about beetroot?

Beetroot—[alongside](#) foods such as berries, nuts and leafy greens—is a "[superfood](#)." It contains above-average levels per gram of certain vitamins and minerals.

Beetroot is particularly [rich in](#) vitamin B and C, minerals, fiber and antioxidants.

Most cooking methods don't significantly alter its [antioxidant levels](#). Pressure cooking does, however, lower levels of carotenoid (a type of antioxidant) compared to raw beetroot.

[Processing](#) into capsules, powders, chips or juice may affect beetroot's ability to act as an antioxidant. However, this can [vary](#) between products, including between different brands of beetroot juice.

## Is beetroot really vegetable Viagra?

The Romans are said to have used beetroot and its juice as an [aphrodisiac](#).

But there's limited scientific evidence to say beetroot improves your sex life. This does not mean it doesn't. Rather, the vast number of scientific [studies](#) looking at the effect of beetroot have not measured libido or other aspects of sexual health.

### How could it work?

When we eat beetroot, chemical reactions involving bacteria and enzymes transform the nitrate in beetroot into nitrite, then to [nitric oxide](#). Nitric oxide helps dilate (widen) blood vessels, potentially [improving circulation](#).

The [richest sources](#) of dietary nitric oxide that have been tested in [clinical studies](#) are beetroot, rocket and spinach.

Nitric oxide is also thought to [support testosterone](#) in its role in controlling blood flow before and during sex in men.

Beetroot's ability to improve blood flow can benefit the [circulatory](#) system of the heart and [blood vessels](#). This may positively impact sexual function, theoretically in men and women.

Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest there could be a *modest* link between beetroot and preparedness for sex, but don't expect it to transform your sex life.

### What else could it do?

Beetroot has received increasing attention over recent years due to its [antioxidant and anti-tumor](#) effect in humans.

Clinical trials have not verified all beetroot's active ingredients and their effects. However, beetroot may be a potentially helpful [treatment](#) for various health issues related to oxidative stress and inflammation, such as cancer and diabetes. The idea is that you can take beetroot supplements or eat extra beetroot alongside your regular medicines (rather than replace them).

There is [evidence](#) beetroot juice can help lower systolic [blood pressure](#) (the first number in your blood pressure reading) by 2.73–4.81 mmHg (millimeters of mercury, the standard unit of measuring blood pressure) in people with high blood pressure. Some researchers say this reduction is comparable to the [effects seen](#) with certain medications and dietary interventions.

[Other research](#) finds even people without high blood pressure (but at risk of it) could benefit.

Beetroot may also improve athletic performance. Some [studies](#) show small benefits for endurance athletes (who run, swim or cycle long distances). These studies looked at various forms of the food, such as [beetroot juice](#) as well as [beetroot-based supplements](#).

## **How to get more beetroot in your diet**

There is scientific evidence to support positive impacts of consuming beetroot in [whole](#), [juice](#) and [supplement](#) forms. So even if you can't get hold of tinned beetroot, there are plenty of other ways you can get more beetroot into your diet. You can try:

- **raw beetroot**—grate raw beetroot and add it to salads or coleslaw, or slice beetroot to use as a crunchy topping for sandwiches or wraps
- **cooked beetroot**—roast beetroot with [olive oil](#), salt and pepper for a flavor packed side dish. Alternatively, steam beetroot and serve it as a standalone dish or mixed into other dishes
- **beetroot juice**—make fresh beetroot juice using a juicer. You can combine it with other fruits and vegetables for added flavor. You can also blend raw or cooked beetroot with water and strain to make a juice
- **smoothies**—add beetroot to your favorite smoothie. It pairs well with fruits such as berries, apples and oranges
- **soups**—use beetroot in soups for both flavor and color. [Borscht](#) is a classic beetroot soup, but you can also experiment with other recipes
- **pickled beetroot**—make pickled beetroot at home, or buy it from the supermarket. This can be a tasty addition to salads or sandwiches
- **beetroot hummus**—blend cooked beetroot into your homemade hummus for a vibrant and nutritious dip. You can also buy beetroot hummus from the supermarket
- **grilled beetroot**—slice beetroot and grill it for a smoky flavor
- **beetroot chips**—slice raw beetroot thinly, toss the slices with olive oil and your favorite seasonings, then bake or dehydrate them to make crispy beetroot chips

- **cakes and baked goods**—add grated beetroot to muffins, cakes, or brownies for a moist and colorful twist.

## Are there any downsides?

Compared to the [large number](#) of studies on the beneficial effects of beetroot, there is very little evidence of negative side effects.

If you eat large amounts of beetroot, your urine may turn red or purple (called [beeturia](#)). But this is generally harmless.

There have been reports in some countries of beetroot-based dietary supplements [contaminated](#) with harmful substances, yet we have not seen this reported in Australia.

## What's the take-home message?

Beetroot may give some modest boost to sex for men and women, likely by helping your circulation. But it's unlikely to transform your sex life or act as vegetable Viagra. We know there are [many contributing factors](#) to sexual well-being. Diet is only one.

For individually tailored support talk to your GP or an [accredited practicing dietitian](#).

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