

The

RED

stuff

EVERYONE KNOWS TO EAT THEIR FIVE-A-DAY BUT COULD THE FACE OF FITNESS BE CHANGED BY ONE VEGETABLE? IS BEETROOT THE WONDER FOOD WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR, ASKS ALISON WALKER

Rather foolishly, for someone who has sexily makeover. Yes, beetroot. Now it's beetroot's turn for a vegetable. Unattractive as the raw beetroot may look, beetroot's being hailed as the new super-veg, and has been attributed with some pretty impressive health benefits over the years. As well as apparently being no doubt that I'd have bought one, and equally no doubt that it would be in a dusty corner with coats thrown over it. Put bluntly, I needed a quick fix.

This form fix came in the form of a Beet-It! Organic Stamina Shot. Recently, fruit's been undergoing a bit of an image rebrand, from government scheme Change4Life's emphasis on daily exercise and fruit and veg, to quirky smoothie-makers Innocent dominating the fruit market, to designer banana cases (honestly).

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Now it's beetroot's turn for a snake venoms. And most importantly for me, due to boosting oxygen usage efficiency, it can also improve stamina by up to 16 per cent. To be fair, the product in itself looks pretty convincing. Standing at a pocket-friendly 4 inches tall with sleek yet understated packaging considering an aphrodisiac in a trendy Californian kitchen. Also, to my student mind, its proportions are reminiscent of Red Bull shots.

Pushing aside the memories of caffeine-fueled revision sessions, I decided to investigate the content a little further. The official website tells me that "the Beet-It! Organic Stamina Shot is a concentrated organic beetroot juice cut with organic lemon juice that has been developed in conjunction with leading UK sports nutritionists."

So far, so good - I decided to do my running shoes and put this wonder-juice to the test. Firstly, though, I had



Choose your juice

- Spinach** A rich source of iron and vitamin C. Goes well with orange
- Pomegranate** High in cancer-fighting antioxidants
- Mango** Great for fibre and essential oils for shiny hair and nails

to actually inhibit the stuff. The website describes beetroot juice as having "a slightly earthy after-taste", which is a slightly awful understatement. It tasted bitter, tangy, muddy, and frankly, not unlike I imagine my running shoes to taste. Initially, I sipped cautiously at it, which proved to be my first mistake. Apparently, it's called a shot for a good reason. I waited 20 minutes for my system to absorb it, and then set off full of beetroot-induced vim. The results were good: I beat my previous time by 4 minutes. However, like anyone who has faint recollections of GCSE science, I knew this could be down to other variable factors: perhaps it was the extra 15 minutes of sleep I'd had that day, the sugary tea from earlier, or more likely, a placebo effect.

I decided to talk to someone who drinks it on a regular basis. Beet-It! enthusiast Roy Scott is a personal trainer and fell-runner who covers over 120 miles a week, apparently fuelled mainly by willpower and half-a-litre of the red stuff. "It's the best thing since sliced bread," he enthused. "Not that I eat sliced bread." At the same time, nor did I he quickly added. "Not enough complex carbs." I asked him if he thought it had actually improved his running times. He told me that on a regular basis, there had been a small but definitely perfectly normal! It may be, but I'm not sure I'm dedicated enough to convert to the cult of beetroot juice yet. I think I'll opt for four minutes and being up to 16 per cent slower, thanks.

BEET-IT! STAMINA SHOT: £4.80 FOR 125ML FROM HOLLAND AND BARRAIT



Coming in at £1.80 per 25cl, it's slightly more expensive than regular sports drinks, but it's got minimal sugar content and you can tick off one of your four five-a-day. Other beetroot juices are available out there, but none comes in a 'shot' format. While it might be tempting to dismiss this as a sports-person wants to be lugging round a litre bottle of beetroot juice. And other brands don't add the lemon juice, making it even more unpalatable. And the taste aside, I can't deny the vast amount of health benefits (and the research that promotes its undeniably logic that says something that tastes so bad MUST be good for you.)

Minimal However, he also said that it'd be unlikely that from just 25cl of it I'd see any noticeable effects, just yet. I may not have reaped any long-term benefits from my short-lived beetroot experience, but it looks like for regular distance runners, it certainly does the trick.

GET BETTER Reduces blood pressure, risk of stroke and heart disease - three major killers that claim thousands every year

DAMAGE CONTROL Detoxifies your liver - not quite panacea for all those boozey nights out, but every little helps

BEAT THE BLUES Has been used to effectively treat depression

ALL GREEK In ancient Athens, beetroot was literally worth its weight in silver, and widely revered.