Orange skin tone from too many carrots? [1]

Alice,

Do people really turn orange if they eat too many carrots?

Answer

Dear Reader,

The old adage, “you are what you eat?” couldn’t be more true when it comes to carrots. To answer your question: yes, you can take on an orange-ish hue if you eat too many carrots. This phenomenon, known in medical circles as carotenemia, fortunately has no known risks to a person’s health. Carrots have this colorful effect because they are chock-full of beta-carotene, which is a pigment found in orange, yellow, and leafy green fruits and veggies. This pigment can then start to build up in a person’s skin tissue, especially in areas of thick skin (such as the palms of the hands and soles of the feet). Under normal circumstances, a more orange skin tone due to extra beta-carotene is generally harmless; however, certain folks may be more prone to carotenemia. Overall, applying the trusty mantra “everything in moderation” when it comes to carrots will probably serve you better, ensuring adequate variety and excitement [2] in your diet.

Though an orange glow may not be the look you’re going for, it’s best not to forego the beta-carotene rich foods or you’ll be missing out on numerous health benefits [3]. Once it’s consumed, the body converts beta-carotene into vitamin A, a key nutrient that packs a powerful health punch: it promotes growth, prevents drying of skin and eyes, helps to maintain the digestive and urinary tracts, and can enhance the body’s ability to stave off bacterial infections. Vitamin A is thought to aid in cancer prevention [4] as well. Fruits and veggies high in beta-carotene such as carrots, squash, pumpkin, sweet potatoes, and green beans, are also rich in other vitamins and minerals that your body needs.

If you do find yourself in an orange skin tone situation, reducing your intake of beta-carotene-rich foods will likely alleviate the issue. Keep in mind; it may take a couple of months before you are back to your normal skin tone. What is an average amount of beta-carotene, you ask? The average recommended intake of five servings of various fruits and vegetables each day contains about six to eight milligrams of beta-carotene. For carotenemia to set in, you might have to consume as much as 20 milligrams per day (or, three large carrots). A side note worth acknowledging is that dietary beta-carotene (and vitamin A) is widely regarded as safe, but taking beta-carotene or vitamin A supplements may cause adverse effects [5]. It’s recommended that you consult with a health care provider before starting any supplements or
dietary changes. As you think about what kinds of fruits and veggies to sub into your diet to keep it varied, watch out for the other fruits and veggies that can also cause skin changing effects. For example, eating tomatoes in excess can cause a similar condition called lycopenemia, which can lead to orange-y skin due to lycopene accumulation.

Lastly, it's also good to note that downing a bag of baby carrots can cause some people to turn a shade orang-er than others. Carotenemia is more commonly associated with people with certain conditions, including who have liver disease, kidney troubles, and hypothyroidism, because these conditions may allow beta-carotene to build up more easily. It's also fairly common among babies eating nothing but that delicious orange-y vegetable puree for their first few years of life. However, if you're noticing a citrus-colored hue to your skin, but haven't been chowing down on beta-carotene rich foods lately, there are a couple of other possibilities for yellowing of the skin: (1) jaundice, which is caused by liver issues, is differentiated by the whites of your eyes turning yellow (your eyes won't change color with plain ol? carotenemia), or (2) diabetes mellitus, which may lead to cases of carotenemia even when the patient isn't consuming above-average amounts of beta-carotene. In the event that you suspect that either of these may be occurring, consider checking in with a health care provider.

All in all, the change in the color of your skin due to carrot consumption is typically harmless, so there's no need to avoid crunching on them as a healthful part of your diet. And, in the words of a true carrot expert? that's what's up when it comes to carotenemia.

Alice!

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