

Vegetables: A Delight for the Health Conscious

Mom was right – they're good for you

By Jean Jeffers, Staff Writer

"Eat your vegetables; they're good for you." Was that your mom's mantra when you were growing up? Moms today say much the same thing, and it's still true: Vegetables are one of the best foods you can include in your diet on a regular basis.

Vegetables are a boon to the cook who's interested in health and proper nutrition for herself and her family. Not only are vegetables low in calories, they are also low in fat and an excellent source of vitamins and minerals. Essential vitamins such as B complex, A, C and K are all found in vegetables, as well as foliate and vitamin E. All the green-yellow-orange vegetables are rich in these vitamins, and they also contain calcium, magnesium, iron,

beta-carotene and potassium.

Vegetables are a great source of antioxidants – those phytochemicals that help fight free radicals, enabling the body to guard against disease, cancer and oxidative stress. Phytochemicals also strengthen the immune system.

Additionally, vegetables are loaded with fiber, both soluble and insoluble. Some examples of the excellent fiber vegetables have are cellulose, mucilage, gums and pectin. These types of fiber effectively absorb excess water in the colon, retain the needed moisture in the waste products and allow for their smooth passage out of the body, thus aiding in regularity.

Eating a rainbow of fresh vegetables on a daily basis helps reduce

the risk of many chronic diseases. Broccoli, tomatoes and spinach all have super-food status because of the many benefits they provide for the body. Some of their elements and benefits include:

1. Calcium – which promotes healthy bones and teeth. It is also necessary for muscles, nerves and some glands.
2. Fiber – it decreases your risk of coronary heart disease and regulates blood cholesterol levels.
3. Potassium – it may help maintain healthy blood pressure.
4. Folate – it aids in the formation of healthy red blood cells.
5. Magnesium – it works with enzymes in your body as well as developing healthy bones.
6. Vitamin C – it helps heal cuts and wounds and provides healthy teeth and gums.
7. Vitamin A – it maintains eye and skin health and protects against infection.

Eating a diet with a heavy concentration of vegetables reduces the risk of succumbing to diseases such as stroke, cancer, heart disease and type 2 diabetes. A rule of thumb is to eat four cups of vegetables daily.

When you bring fresh vegetables home, the first thing to do is wash them. Rinse them under the tap,

then in salt water for a few minutes. Swish them in cool water to be sure they are clean. It is best to use vegetables while they are fresh, so when shopping, buy only a small amount at a time and replenish the supply daily or every other day. Some vegetables have a very short shelf life and the healthy benefits that come from their vitamins decline with age. If they require storing, place them in plastic Ziploc bags to preserve their nutrition until you use them.

Sources and Resources

National Institute of Health Facts Sheets on Health, 2015

U.S. Department of Agriculture: "Why Is it Important to Eat Vegetables?"

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