

The Memory Lane

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Vegetables that are healthier cooked than raw

By Susan Landeis | February 7, 2018

We all know that eating vegetables is an important part of a healthy diet. Some of us have even heard that cooking vegetables can leach out key vitamins and nutrients. Although in some cases that may be true, it just isn't quite that simple.

Consuming raw vegetables has its nutritional benefits, but roasting, baking, sauteing, grilling and steaming vegetables can also be beneficial. Cooking vegetables breaks down tough cell walls to help release important nutrients. This helps make them more available, so your body absorbs them easier.

It is always important to remember to eat a variety of vegetables that are prepared in a variety of ways for healthy nutrition. But there are certain kinds of vegetables that can be especially nutritious when cooked. Here is a list of vegetables that are potentially more nutritious under heat.

Tomatoes:

Tomatoes contain a phytochemical called lycopene. Not only is it responsible for giving tomatoes a red color, but research has also shown a link to cancer prevention and a

lower rate of heart disease. Raw tomatoes have thick cell walls, but once they are cooked the lycopene becomes much easier for our bodies to absorb. There are plenty of ways to eat cooked tomatoes. You can puree them in a pasta sauce, roast them in the oven with a drizzle of olive oil, or grill them and add to a sandwich.

Carrots:

Carrots contain a compound called beta-carotene. This important compound gives carrots their bright color, and also converts to vitamin A in the body. Vitamin A is essential for eye health, immune health, and healthy skin. Try boiling them until tender, then add a drizzle of honey or maple syrup to enhance their natural sweetness.

Mushrooms:

Mushrooms are not really a vegetable at all, but rather a fungus. They offer many health benefits, and are rich in protein, fiber and vitamins. The best cooking options for mushrooms is grilling them with a little olive oil, or even cooking them in the microwave is a good way to increase their antioxidant levels.

Asparagus:

Asparagus is packed with vitamins and minerals, which includes cancer fighting vitamins A, C, and E, and also folate. Asparagus has thick cell walls that make it hard to absorb these nutrients. Cooking helps break down these cells to make nutrients more available for our bodies to absorb. Asparagus can be grilled, roasted, or boiled in water until crisp tender, and bright green.

Spinach:

Spinach is a leafy green vegetable that is packed with essential nutrients such as vitamins A and E, fiber, calcium, folate and iron. Cooking spinach helps break down oxalic acid, which can block the absorption of important nutrients. Consuming spinach that has been heated can help you absorb higher levels of vitamins and minerals. You can try steaming, or blanching in boiling water for 1 minute, then immediately dropping into cold water for a few more minutes.

Pumpkin:

Eating raw pumpkin doesn't sound very appetizing, but eating cooked pumpkin, as well as other cooked squash is much more nutritious.

Pumpkin has a long list of healthy benefits and is one of the best sources of beta-carotene.

Beta-carotene is a powerful antioxidant that our body converts to vitamin A. It also gives pumpkins their bright orange color. You can make your own pumpkin puree or purchase canned puree to use in smoothies and desserts. You can also use in place of butter or oil in your favorite baking recipes.

Finding ways to take advantage of the health benefits of food doesn't have to be difficult. There are many ways to utilize their full potential just by getting creative with your cooking styles. As a family caregiver, I am constantly looking for more natural ways to improve not only my father's health, but my own health as well.

Consuming a wide variety of whole foods offers greater nutrition, essential fiber, and protective substances that can help protect against illness and disease. The cooking methods we use can either diminish the nutritional quality of our meals, or unleash its full potential.