

The York University Staff Association Health and Wellness News and Views

I don't have to tell you to eat more vegetables, there's only about... a few thousand health reasons to do so. Vegetables are one of those foods people either love or hate. The problem with hating vegetables is that they are arguably the most health-promoting food group on the planet. If you aren't eating vegetables, you aren't getting all their amazing nutrients like fibre, antioxidants, powerful phytochemicals and several vitamins. Unfortunately some of the components that make vegetables so healthy are the same reasons that cause many of us (and not just 4 year olds) to shudder with distaste at the sight of them. Dietary guidelines recommend that we get at least 5 servings of vegetables per day. Veggies are low in calories, yet packed with vitamins that help you feel full. However for so many of us veggies are a serious chore to incorporate into our daily meals. There is hope, with a little extra know-how at the grocery store and in the kitchen, you can rekindle your love affair with this essential food group.

Brussels Sprouts

These baby cabbages contain 38 calories per cup and are full of cancer preventing phytonutrients and a ton of fibre. Brussels sprouts probably have the worst reputation of any vegetable. They're the classic example of the vegetable hated by both kids and adults. When boiling brussels, they tend to give off a stinky sulfurous smell. Yuck! But the truth is, if you know how to cook brussels sprouts properly, they can really be delicious. Roasting brussels will seal in both the nutrients and most importantly the flavour. Just slice in half and toss with garlic and olive oil. Roast at 400 degrees until tender.

Okra

This insoluble fibre helps digestion and prevents constipation. Okra is also a good source of vitamin B6 and folate. When stewed or cooked with liquid, okra can, indeed, get "slimy." Quick cooking and dry heat, however, let the crisp, grassy flavor of fresh okra shine through. Whether you've had a bad experience with okra and want to give it a second try or are just cooking it for the first time, try using the following technique. You'll see a whole new side to okra.

12 okras
1/2 onion
2 cloves garlic
2 tbsp. oil
salt to taste
pepper to taste
Fry okra until it has a golden colour.

Kale

Move over Popeye and make room for the "queen of greens," kale. Gaining in popularity, kale is an amazing vegetable being recognized for its exceptional nutrient richness, health benefits, and delicious flavor. Kale provides a day's worth of vitamins C and A, and more than five times the recommended amount of vitamin K. It is also a good source of minerals copper, potassium, iron, magnesium, and phosphorus. Clearly, it's no secret that kale is one of nature's super foods, and getting it into your diet is worth the effort. Massaging kale breaks down the cellulose in the plant and allows the natural flavour to come through. Here is a healthy recipe you and your family will love.

1 tbsp (15 mL) olive oil
3 cloves garlic, sliced
6 cups (1.5 L) torn stemmed kale
2 tsp (10 mL) lemon juice
1 pinch each salt and pepper
In skillet, heat oil over medium heat; cook garlic until fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in kale; cook until slightly wilted and dark green, about 5 minutes. Stir in lemon juice, salt and pepper.

Beets

Beets are rich in iron, fibre, folate, and potassium, and also full of disease fighting antioxidants. The problem with beets, as half the world knows, is that they kind of taste like dirt. (The other half "the beet-lovers" prefer the euphemism "earthy," but they're not fooling anyone.) As food dislikes go, beets are a popular one. Why not try making them delicious. After peeling, drizzle beets with a little olive oil and roast them like a potato. Or you could try pickled beets, which have a crispier texture. When beets are pickled in a combination of vinegar, sugar, and spices they taste similar to sweet pickles. Before

summer tomatoes are ripe enough for Greek salad, swap in sweet roasted beets instead.

4 medium beets, preferably a mixture of red, candy striped, and gold. trimmed and scrubbed
4 tbsp olive oil
6 tbsp red wine vinegar
1/4 cup chopped red onion
2 romaine hearts, cut
6 celery stalks chopped
1/4 cup crumbled feta cheese
2 tbsp pitted olives
1/2 tsp dried oregano

Preheat oven to 325. Place beets on large sheet of foil. Drizzle with 1 tbsp oil. Season with salt and pepper. Wrap beets tightly and roast until a knife goes through them easily. (about 1 hour and 15 minutes) When beets are cool enough to handle, peel and cut into wedges. Whisk vinegar, remaining oil, oregano, and a pinch of salt and pepper. Arrange beets on a serving plate. Drizzle with 1/2 of the dressing. Top with romaine, celery, feta and olives. Drizzle with remaining dressing. Season to taste.

For some quick and easy ways to include veggies into your everyday meals. Try layering zucchini slices, chopped spinach, or cooked carrots into lasagna. Stir broccoli florets into macaroni and cheese. Add grated carrots or zucchini to pancakes. Toss whatever veggies you like (tomatoes, spinach, mushrooms, broccoli, asparagus) into an omelet or quesadilla.

The bottom line... You need to eat vegetables everyday because there is simply not another food group that is as perfectly matched to our everyday human needs. From so many different perspectives, the nature of vegetables and the nature of human health are matched up in a way that simply cannot be duplicated by other food groups. Be sure to try lots of different vegetables. There are hundreds out there, with tens of thousands of recipes available just a few keystrokes away.

Take care of your body - it's the only place you have to live.

Kerriane Brown

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