

# NEW-LIFESTYLES STEPS TO A HEALTHIER YOU<sup>SM</sup> VEGGIE FACTS

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Research continues to support the undeniable health benefits of a diet rich in vegetables. Considered to be some of the world's healthiest diets, Japanese and Mediterranean diets regularly incorporate many nutrient-rich vegetables into their traditional everyday recipes. Raw, cooked, pureed, steamed, poached and roasted, vegetables comprise a color palette Monet would envy.

Besides adding color to our plates, vegetables provide essential vitamins and minerals, dietary fiber, water and other substances that are important for good health. Along with fruits, vegetables are also good sources of vitamin A, vitamin C, folate and potassium. Eating the recommended 5 to 9 servings a day may reduce the risk of cancer and protect from other chronic diseases like heart disease and stroke. Naturally low in fat and calories and cholesterol-free, there's no over-indulging when it comes to vegetables. So, fill up your plate with a variety of good vegetables!

## 1. Lately, I've been hearing about the health benefits of "superfoods." Could you tell me more about them?

The so-named "superfoods" are a list of 14 foods composed by

Steven Pratt, MD who found these nutrient-rich foods commonly reoccurring in the world's healthier diets. Each of the "superfoods" has been praised for its nutritional value and resulting health benefits. Of the 14 listed "superfoods," eight are fruits and vegetables: beans, blueberries, broccoli, oranges, pumpkin, soy, spinach and tomatoes.

## 2. What is the safe, recommended way to wash fresh produce?

Wash fruits and vegetables under running water in a clean sink. Do not use soap, bleach or other chemical detergents to wash fruits and vegetables as they can be poisonous! If fruits and vegetables are firm, scrub them with a clean vegetable/fruit brush. For soft vegetables and fruit like tomatoes, rub gently with your hands under running water to remove dirt. Remove outer leaves of leafy vegetables like cabbage, lettuce and brussels sprouts before washing.

Produce washes currently marketed are expensive and not recommended for effective washing of fruits and vegetables.

## 3. What are phytochemicals?

Phytochemicals are nonnutritive plant chemicals that contain protective, disease-preventing compounds. More than 900 different phytochemicals have been identified



as components of food, and many more phytochemicals continue to be discovered today. It is estimated that there may be more than 100 different phytochemicals in just one serving of vegetables.

By regularly eating vegetables and fruit from each color group (orange/yellow, red, green, white and blue/purple) you will benefit from all of the phytochemicals' health-promoting properties.

#### **4. If it is recommended that I eat 5 to 9 servings of fruit and vegetables daily, how big is one serving of vegetables?**

One serving size of vegetables is defined as:

3/4 cup (6 oz.) 100 percent vegetable juice

1/2 cup raw or cooked vegetables

1 cup raw, leafy vegetables

1/2 cup cooked or canned peas or beans

### **Here are some tips for picking and preparing the freshest vegetables:**

#### **Bell peppers**

Fresh bell peppers come in a variety of colors, shapes and sizes, but when selecting them, they all follow the same guidelines. Red bell peppers are just mature green bell peppers. Their skin should be firm without any wrinkles, and the stem should be fresh and green. They should feel heavy for their size. Avoid peppers with sunken areas, slashes or black spots.

To prepare, wash and remove the stem and seeds, which are indigestible. Enjoy their raw crispness in a colorful salad or roast them to bring out their sweetness Mediterranean-style.

#### **Corn**

Choose corn with tight green husks. Check each ear of corn by pulling the husk open to make sure the kernels are plump and arranged in tight rows. The kernels should be smaller at the tip of each ear – if they are as big at the tip as they are at the base, the corn has been over matured and may be tough.

Refrigerate corn to prevent the ears from becoming less sweet, as heat converts corn's sugar content into starch.

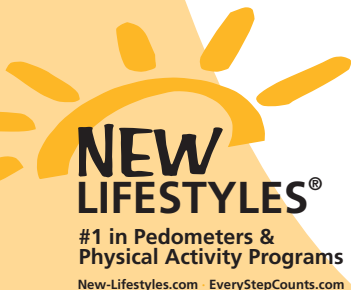
#### **Artichokes**

Closest relative to the thistle, artichokes are actually a flower bud. Choose an artichoke that is compact with tight leaves and feels heavy for its size. The stem width should be in proportion to the overall size of the artichoke. When you squeeze a fresh artichoke, the leaves will make a squeaky noise. Wash artichokes under cold running water. Pull off the lower petals and cut the stems to one inch or less. Cut the top quarter of each artichoke and snip off the sharp tips with kitchen shears.

Cook the artichokes soon after you cut them or they will turn brown. A lemon-water bath will help to keep their green color. Usually boiled or steamed, artichokes can be eaten whole or added to other dishes.

To eat an artichoke, pull off the leaves one-by-one and eat the fleshy ends attached to the plant by scraping them against your bottom teeth. As you get to the interior of the artichoke, the leaves will become smaller, lighter in color and bitter. Discard the bitter leaves and scrape off the fuzzy tuft covering the heart of the artichoke. Considered by most people to be the best part of the artichoke, the heart can be broken apart and eaten. Dip the leaves in the traditional melted butter or try a lighter lemon vinaigrette.

Are you wondering what the other 6 "superfoods" are? They are oats, tea (black or green), turkey, walnuts, wild salmon and yogurt.



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