

Nutrition News

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Eat Vegetables, Move More: Vegetables for a Healthy Heart

February is often called Heart Month. Did you know it is called that not just because of Valentine's Day? It is also the month when the nation focuses on preventing heart disease. This makes February a great time to talk about the role of vegetables in heart health.

We have always known vegetables are good for us and that they help keep us healthy. Now let's find out how.

Vegetables & Heart Health - How can vegetables help keep my heart healthy?

Many vegetables contain nutrients such as fiber, folate, vitamin C, potassium and phytochemicals. All of these are important in heart health. Fiber has been shown to decrease LDL or "bad cholesterol." Folate helps reduce high homocysteine levels, which have been linked to an increased risk of heart disease. A healthy intake of vitamin C from foods has been shown to help decrease the risk of heart disease. An increased potassium intake from foods may help lower blood pressure. Phytochemicals such as anthocyanins (purple vegetables – eggplant), sulforaphanes (garlic or onions) or carotenoids (yellow or orange vegetables – carrots) may help decrease the risk of heart disease by reducing the buildup of LDL in arteries.

Featured Vegetables - Which vegetables will help keep my heart healthy?

- **Parsnips**
Good source of vitamin C, fiber and folate.
- **Spinach, Swiss Chard, Turnip Greens, Mustard Greens, Collard Greens**
Good sources of vitamin C and phytochemicals. (*Spinach is also a great source of folate.*)
- **Tomatoes**
A good or excellent source of vitamin C, potassium, phytochemicals and many more!

Other Vegetables - Should I eat other vegetables that were not listed?

YES – all vegetables are good for you. The vegetables listed above are just a few of the examples that can help reduce one's risk of heart disease. Remember, it is important to consume a variety of vegetables each day to make sure you get the many special nutrients in each vegetable.

Quick Tips for Using the Featured Vegetables

| Vegetables | What to look for | Storage & Preparation | Great Uses |
|---|--|--|---|
| Parsnips | Well-shaped, small, firm roots. Large parsnips have a woody core and require more peeling. | If refrigerated parsnips will keep for a week or more. | Cut into cubes and use in soups or stews. Can be boiled and mashed and mixed with mashed potatoes for a sweeter, richer flavor. |
| Spinach; Swiss chard; Turnip, Mustard or Collard Greens | Firm, fresh, crisp, deep green leaves with no blemishes, wilting, or insect damage. | Will keep for one or two days if refrigerated. Rinse as many times as necessary to remove sand. Store in a plastic bag to retain flavor. Use raw or cooked. | Use raw spinach or Swiss chard in salads then add your favorite salad vegetables and toppings. Steam, using only the water that clings to the leaves after washing. |
| Tomato | Plump, free from bruises and other defects | Store unripe tomatoes away from direct sunlight or in a paper bag. Ripe tomatoes can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 1 week. Rinse tomatoes before cutting or using whole. | Use raw in salads, on sandwiched or as a snack. Use cooked in your favorite casseroles and soups. |



Family Fun Activity • Cooking Together

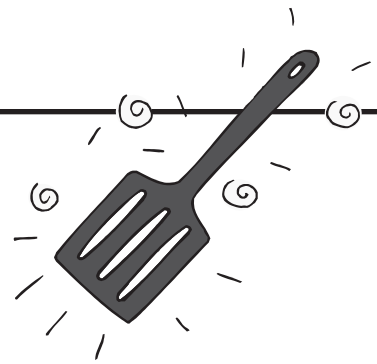
Rainbow Chard

Ingredients:

- 2 cups Swiss chard greens rinsed, chopped
- 1 medium tomato rinsed, chopped
- 1 clove of garlic minced
- 1 teaspoon of canola or olive oil

Directions:

1. Add oil to pan and heat on medium.
2. When oil starts to get hot, add garlic and cook for 1-2 minutes.
3. Add tomato and cook for 1-2 minutes.
4. Add Swiss chard greens and cook 2 minutes or until wilted. Do not overcook.
5. May serve warm as a vegetable side dish, over rice or mixed with pasta.



Sources:

Home and Garden Bulletin #258: How to Buy Fresh Vegetables, USDA, Agricultural marketing service.

4-H Growing Connections: Rainbow Chard Recipe, University of Vermont Extension.

Hands, ES. Nutrients in Food. 1st ed. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, Williams and Wilkins; 2000: 209-218.

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