www.aseasonofhappiness.com

Fruits, Roots and Vegies

the healthy choice - so have your fill

Sorry, folks - this is going to be a rather long one. It's your choice if you wish to plod through; or you might prefer to skim and scan, just pausing at those inclusions you'd like to know more about. Even then, they will only be brief descriptions; but hopefully there will be enough info to cover some of the main benefits of the individual items.

We are only as healthy as the food we eat, and sticking to a regular balanced diet seems the way to go. My personal daily inclusion - apart from the odd pizza - is a serve of five vegies with the meat; and I've found that if I don't have them, I am very lethargic next day. As for fruit, I'm not a fan; but then, picking it seven days a week kind-of put me off. Mind you, lemon meringue pie continues to be my saving excuse. There is, however, little doubt that for most, a daily serve of fruit is a refreshing, beneficial experience.

Our current research was littered with references to "free radicals" which sounded like recalcitrant anarchists running riot in the body; but I've never seen a free radical, or the boogey man, so I can't attest to the existence of either. Following, however, are some of the more popular in the fruits, roots, and vegies departments; along with their individual claims to fame health-wise. These protagonists, at least, are pick-able, touchable and edible; and no home should be without some.

FRUITS

Apples

An apple a day keeps the doctor away would seem to be no rash statement. Apples contain vitamins C, B6, K, and riboflavin; a number of minerals including potassium, copper, manganese, and magnesium; plus a string of compounds, the names of which I struggle to pronounce. Still, add to these the dietary fibre - one apple provides 12% of the daily requirement - and it is pretty much a health essential.

There are many claims that apples can help in the cure and prevention of stomach disorders, anemia, diabetes, rheumatism and even cancer, and I don't doubt they are true to a degree; but my favourite is the suggestion that they aid concentration and stop the breakdown of the nerve cells that produce dopamine. That's good news for Alzheimer's and Parkinson's sufferers. And even if it only works a bit; as long as it's tasty, where's the harm in a Golden Delicious or two a day?

Blueberries

Called "all-star" by many, they contain antioxidants (anthocyanins). Not only is this bluey-purple pigment a powerful dye; but it is said to prevent cell damage in the body, and this may be good for reducing the incidence of cancer. These anthocyanins may, just may, protect against heart disease and stroke; not to mention improving learning and memory. We could all probably do with a few of these berries once in a while. I know I could!

Citrus Fruits

Vitamin C is needed for the synthesis of collagen which has numerous healing properties; and citrus has plenty of that. Then there's folate for cell division and DNA synthesis; and we have thiamin which is important for the metabolism. These fruits apparently also contain compounds called flavonoids. Certain studies showed them to improve coronary arterial blood flow, thus reducing the formation of blood clots and the production of "bad" cholesterol. Refreshing and tangy, the different varieties have a host of obvious uses in the kitchen and the bar. And if you're all at sea, get some C - lemons are the thing for preventing scurvy.

Cranberries
Roast turkey wouldn't be the same without cranberry sauce. The deep red berry, however, has more going for it than just the flavour; or, for that matter, the flavonoids it contains. There are also phenolic acids that may be handy as antioxidants which supposedly keep those pesky free radicals at bay. Research is being conducted into the possibility that extracts of this fruit may be later used in cancer treatment.

Strawberries
Oh yeah - strawberry shortcake: I knew there was some reason I thought it was good. Apparently, one cup of these tangy, juicy berries dishes the body up with nearly 3 grams of the soluble fibre that is helpful in lowering "bad" cholesterol. This single cup contributes in excess of 100% of an adult's daily requirement of vitamin C, which is critical to the body's immune system. Hey - lemon meringue pie AND strawberry shortcake: now, that's my idea of double health indemnity!

Stone Fruits
Considering that professional golfers eat them to keep up the potassium levels, you may be wondering why I haven't included bananas on the list. Well, people in colder climes have to rely on imports, and very often these are out of cold store. Because they are picked unripe, they generally taste like soft plastic, have little flavour; and, I suspect, have reduced nutritional value. Forget the banana - go for ripe peaches. Two small ones will give you more potassium than a single banana, and they are juicier. Why do you need potassium anyway? For muscle function, that's why; and peaches are supposed to make the skin healthier and improve eyesight into the bargain.

Then again, you might want to think about munching four or five apricots - they'll give you all the vitamin A you need in a day, plus 20% of your vitamin C. AND, because they are low in calories, fat and sugar they are almost pure weight-watcher sugar boosters minus the actual sugar.

Tomatoes
Tomatoes are a versatile fruit that can be eaten cold or hot. Apparently, cooking or stewing can actually increase the effects of some nutrients, and there are plenty of them. Toms are rich in potassium, and they also contain vitamins A,C and E. As for beta-carotene - which is said to protect against cancer, maintains a healthy blood pressure and reduces blood glucose in diabetes sufferers - for some reason there is a higher content of this in cherry tomatoes rather than in the ordinary ones. Another benefit is protection against light-induced eye damage.

Studies have found that many of the health properties of tomatoes are in the skins, which means it's best if they aren't peeled. HOWEVER, they are said to have a very high pesticide residue; so wash them thoroughly before eating.

ROOTS

Root Vegies

You know what they are: carrots, swedes, turnips, parsnips, beets, et al. They all seem to contain a wealth of those vitamins and minerals essential for our wellbeing. Take turnips, for instance - vitamins A, B1,B2, B3, B5, B6, C, E, K, and folate; plus minerals like manganese, potassium, magnesium, iron, calcium and copper. And if these weren't enough, they also have phosphorus, omega-3 fatty acids, protein and are loaded with fibre. With those impressive credentials, who wouldn't want a turnip as a life-long companion?

Root vegetables are a natural source of complex carbohydrates, antioxidants and other nutrients; and they are all gluten-free. They tend to be lower in calories than many grains and have a lower GI, so they won't spike your blood sugar as quickly; and they are less inclined to cause digestive or inflammatory problems.

Although nutritional content varies between types, most root vegies when cooked have about 50–100 calories per ½-cup serving; and three or more grams of fibre. We hear a lot about fibre with respect to regularity versus constipation, and hopefully this is a benefit for most. The bonus seems to be that the carbs they contain are slower-burning; and also being high in fibre, they linger in the digestive tract, keeping you feeling full for longer.

Root vegetables benefit the immune system by lowering inflammation that can encourage chronic diseases like cancer and heart disease. They protect skin and eye health, and (woo-hoo!) apparently reduce free radical damage. The fibre in starchy vegies slows down the release of glucose (sugar), and that's important for insulin balance and lowering the risk of insulin resistance.

With the exception of potatoes, I won't list the different types of root vegetables individually because they are all very similar with respect to health content. What I will say is that cooking methods may reduce the nutritional values. Boiling can do this, whereas microwaving in a small amount of water is claimed to be a better way; and stir-frying so that they stay crunchy is a good second choice. You can, of course, eat them raw; but if you prefer this option, please take note of the message in Healthy Living HL35 - Preparing Fruit and Vegetables: to avoid poisoning yourself!

Potatoes
They've been the staple diet of many; certainly folks in the UK after Nutty Walt (Sir Walter Raleigh) brought some spuds back from the Americas and presented them to Queen Elizabeth I. Maybe, in hindsight, he might have regretted introducing tobacco as well; but he couldn't have foreseen the tragedy that stuck because his edible discovery became, in a future time, suddenly unavailable. This was a potato shortage which drove prices up to the point when many pensioners who couldn't afford them died because they were deprived of the vitamin C they contained. Maybe that brought it home with a bang - potatoes are more than just a filling side vegie.

Apart from the vitamin C - but don't forget it - the iron, phosphorous, calcium, magnesium, and zinc in potatoes help build and maintain bone structure and strength. Along with potassium these have been found to naturally lower blood pressure. So, considering the fibre, vitamin B6 and lack of cholesterol, the humble spud is good for the heart. Choline is also present (one large potato contains 57 mg), and this nutrient apparently assists with muscle movement, mood, learning, and memory.

Many weight-loss programs suggest reducing carbohydrate intake, and for this reason dieters often dump the potato, which is probably not a good idea. The vitamin B6 actually breaks down carbohydrates; and with respect to satisfaction, they are a better, longer-lasting hunger-buster than rabbit food. A person who isn't starving half the time is less likely to binge and load on the calories. So, plain potatoes are good for you - just as they are though: nuked, boiled or baked without any additions like butter and cream. Sorry, but those are the facts.

AND VEGIES

Broccoli
Broccoli contains Vitamin K, necessary to promote the functioning of proteins affecting blood clotting. So, anyone on Warfarin, or similar, should avoid this vegetable. For the rest of us, it is a good source of vitamin C, as well as folic acid, which is necessary for the production and maintenance of new cells in the body. There's also potassium, a mineral and electrolyte essential for the function of nerves and heart contraction. The fibre content of broccoli is undeniable; and there's plenty of it, especially in the stalks which we've found great in stir-fries and stews.

Cabbage
Is an excellent source of vitamins B1, B2, B6, C and K. It has much more - manganese, dietary fibre, potassium, folate and copper. Additionally, cabbage has a swag of choline, phosphorus, magnesium, calcium, selenium, iron, pantothenic acid, protein and niacin. Shredded in coleslaw,

stir-fried, cooked on its own, or pan-fried with mashed potatoes as bubble and squeak, cabbage is a must in the kitchen.

And, don't forget: taking leaves from the outside instead of slicing makes it last longer. Well-wrapped in a plastic bag and put in the vegie drawer of the fridge, a head of cabbage will keep for up to a month.

Cauliflower
Cauliflower is a member of the cancer-fighting cruciferous family of vegetables; is anti-inflammatory and antioxidant-rich. It may even boost heart and brain health. Aside from vitamin C, K and beta-carotene, cauliflower also contains sulforaphane, a sulphur compound claimed to slow tumorous growths by killing cancer stem cells. It is said to improve blood pressure and kidney function into the bargain. And check out the other contents - vitamin B6 (good for brain development) and then there's protein, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, magnesium, phosphorus, fibre, folate, pantothenic acid, potassium, manganese and choline.

A vegie that can have all that, and be a versatile, low-carb substitute for potatoes, why wouldn't you want it on your plate?

Celery
It is apparently an excellent source of antioxidants and beneficial enzymes; and has vitamins C, B6, K, plus potassium and folate. There's fibre a-plenty - maybe a bit too much when it gets old and stringy. It used to be thought that wrapping the stalks when growing to keep them white was the way to go; then someone realised green was good; and now we all benefit. Hot or cold, and even popped in a drink as a swizzle-stick, celery has to be something of a quiet achiever.

Garlic
When our son visited and noticed a bunch of garlic hanging outside the back door, he asked if we had vampires. As it happened, we didn't, so it must have worked. Maybe that was to do with the fact that garlic is enriched with Vitamins B1, B2, B3, B6, C, folate, calcium, iron, magnesium, manganese, phosphorous, potassium, sodium and zinc. If that lot didn't send Dracula on his way, it could have been the high sulphur content, giving it antibiotic properties and helping to keep the digestive system clean by flushing out toxins - must have done something to the blood, too? It is also said that its medicinal value is higher when consumed raw. Heavy breathing after that certainly ought to keep the Count and other virus-carrying individuals well away.

Legumes
Beans and peas seem to contain most of the usual vitamins and minerals; but the seeds from the mature plants are richer sources. Often dried, these can be rehydrated overnight in a bowl of water, then slow-cooked the following day. I guess sacks of them would have been an essential on board the olden-day chuck wagons. The immature, green legumes are still tasty, though, and they have loads of fibre which takes a while to break down in the digestive system, keeping the hunger pangs away for longer. Low in saturated fat and calories, having them several times a week promotes bowel regularity and helps keep blood sugar levels in check.

It is said that, as a good source of plant protein, legumes are an ideal meat substitute, especially as they are cholesterol-free and contain no saturated fat. So, instead of a quarter pounder, how about a bean burger with onions and salad?

Onions
I read that: "the phytochemicals in onions along with their vitamin C help improve immunity" - that sounds like a line from Star Trek. Then, I learned that they also "contain chromium, which assists in regulating blood sugar"; and presumably prevents one from going rusty. According to the same source, "raw onion lowers the production of bad cholesterol". AND, onion juice applied to a bee sting provides "immediate relief from the pain and burning sensation."
But wait - there's more. "Onions scavenge free radicals, thereby reducing the risk of developing gastric ulcers". That would seem to fly in the face of the fact that they can cause indigestion; but then there's always Alka Seltzer.
My opinion - I reckon onions are great; and there aren't too many meals I cook without them.

Spinach
Presumably Popeye could see real well, because spinach promotes healthy vision. The lutein and zeaxanthin, carotenoid pigments that accumulate in the retina of the eye, are capable of absorbing blue light and can prevent a considerable amount of it from reaching structures of the eye involved in vision. Late night I-padders should always keep a bowl of spinach handy.

It also contains Vitamin A, another essential for functions in normal vision. Apparently, a deficiency of this vitamin leads to a condition called "night blindness." Apart from promoting healthy vision, spinach can help regulate the production of red blood cells and the normal functioning of the immune system. As a very green vegie, it also has vitamin K; so the same rule applies with respect to blood-clotting and anyone taking Warfarin.

The final few do need a mention; but they may have issues for some people.

Although **Sweet Corn** is a gluten-free cereal, it contains about 86 calories per 100 g – not ideal for weight-watchers – and it is high GI, so is not advisable for diabetes patients.

Like some other green vegetables, **Lettuce** and **cucumbers** also contain vitamin K; but they do have plenty of fibre and a wide range of vitamins and minerals. Having a high water content, they are an ideal re-hydrating food, especially on a hot summer's day.

A word of warning about ALL fruits, roots and vegies – wash them well before use. And if they are available and your budget can handle it, go for organic where possible. Chemical residue is always going to be a worry, especially with those fruits that are waxed for protection during handling and transport. These waxes – there a number of different ones – can trap residue and are difficult to remove. Peeling is probably the only safe way; but much of the skin's nutrient qualities are then lost.

So, if you can buy locally from smaller growers when their crops are in season and picked daily, it is a better, healthier option. As for out-of-season cold store stuff, that's your choice, but I wouldn't touch it with a forty-foot pole!

I said this article was going to be long; despite which it is nowhere near comprehensive. There's a mine of information about fruits, roots and vegies available on Google, if you really want to know more. Most of it, however, seems to confirm that these foodstuffs are miraculously and totally necessary for good health; and if you reckon they taste good, just enjoy in the knowledge that all of the vitamins, minerals and tongue-twisting compounds are quietly doing their job.

A Season of Happiness - helping you towards a better lifestyle

For a look at some more informative articles on a variety of subjects just return to the web page

Where every effort has been made to be accurate and fair-minded, comments and opinions expressed on this website are based on personal experience and do not necessarily reflect the views of the wider community or those groups and institutions mentioned. A Season of Happiness and its staff accept no responsibility for any outcome based on suggestions offered. What works for us may not work for you. Please bear this in mind.

Copyright © 2018 All Rights Reserved