

NUTRITION TO NOURISH



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Staying Healthy for the Holidays

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays!

With the illnesses going around, I hope this finds you all and your loved ones healthy and doing well. The Christmas season is typically a time we associate with gatherings, celebrations, and (of course) food. While some use it as “one last hoorah” for eating whatever they want before making their New Years resolution to lose weight starting January 1st, I encourage you to take another approach. Continue to work towards your goal of healthier eating habits (no matter if it's decreasing carbohydrate portion sizes, eating a more plant based diet, decreasing fat, increasing non-starchy vegetables, or whatever you're currently working toward) during this season or go ahead and start the goal in the midst of the holiday season. I recently heard a

quote (the original source wasn't mentioned) that stays, “Until it becomes more painful to stay in your current circumstances than to change, nothing will happen.” I had to read that several times myself to fully wrap my mind around it, but it's saying change generally happens when it becomes more painful to keep doing what you're doing and easier to make some changes. While holiday eating is part of the fun, I encourage you to think about positive changes you can make now before it gets to the point where your current habits cause you more pain or frustration. From a nutrition standpoint, this might include receiving a diagnosis of pre-diabetes, noticing ongoing weight gain, having an exacerbation of heart disease, or simply more stiffness due to being sedentary. I encourage you to think about some health areas where you are headed in the wrong direction

and decide to make one change starting now to get you back on track to better health.

I do live in the county and do understand it's likely we'll all have an opportunity to eat some delicious food this season that we won't get to have the rest of the year. For that reason, I am including some ideas to help control eating and prevent the normal holiday weight gain. You can still enjoy those foods without overdoing it!

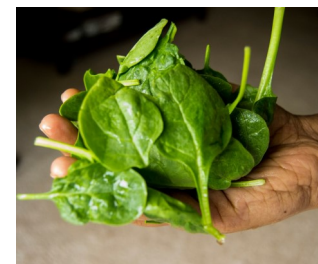
Happy and Healthy Eating,

Mary Beth

Spectacular Spinach—Produce Item of the Month

Spinach is a non-starchy vegetable that is higher in antioxidants than most lettuce greens and stays in season for much longer into the winter. It is still in season in Virginia for this last month of the year and then will return to being in season again in March. If you check out the American Institute for Cancer Research's list of cancer-fighting foods, you will see spinach made the list. It

has also been shown to contain compounds to promote reduction of blood pressure and increase in blood flow (to prevent blood clots and stroke risk). Lastly, it has been shown to increase nitric oxide, which is a chemical messenger that signals the immune cells to kill bacteria and cancer cells.



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Party it Up without the Nutrition Regrets



Are you someone who gets excited about the smorgasbord of food at holiday gatherings or has trouble pushing away from the table of delicious food long after you feel satisfied? No matter if it's a small family dinner or large friend or work party, there are some things to help control your eating so you can enjoy the foods without overindulging. Find one or two of these suggestions to try at your next gathering.

- ◆ Don't arrive on an empty stomach.
- ◆ Offer to bring a healthy dish.
- ◆ Avoid sugary drinks, alcohol, and snacks.
- ◆ Select small portions.
- ◆ Eat slowly until satisfied, not stuffed.
- ◆ Leave the table when you are done.
- ◆ Go for a walk or play a game after the meal.
- ◆ Focus on the people and not the food.
- ◆ Use healthy recipe substitutions when cooking.

Success with Including Spinach

Spinach has significant health benefits because it contains a variety of beneficial compounds noted below:

- Beta-carotene – Phytonutrient that can inhibit cancer cell growth, works as an antioxidant, and improves immune response
- Lutein/zeaxanthin-Phytonutrient that helps to protect the eyes and reduce inflammation
- Folate - Important in red blood cell formation and for healthy cell growth and function
- Flavonoids – Phytonutrient that can inhibit inflammation and tumor growth, aid in immunity, and boost production of detoxifying enzymes in the body

Try adding it to tossed garden salads, using on sandwiches or burgers in place of lettuce, shredding it on tacos, adding it to your morning smoothie (it may change the color but not the taste), or including it

in an omelet.

To preserve freshness, soak the spinach in ice water after purchase, spin it dry in a salad spinner, and store it in a microperforated bag. The best way to retain the beneficial nutrients is to look for mid-sized spinach leaves (they have a higher phytochemical content than baby spinach), eat it raw or cook in a way that doesn't involve boiling in water (think steaming, microwaving, or baking). Spinach can be purchased from sellers at Farmer's Markets or a produce stand as well as grocery stores. You can also consider growing your own from either seed or a small plant (generally found in garden centers early in the year).

- Grow your own or purchase in bunches rather than bags.
- Increased time in bag = lower antioxidant properties
- Spinach leaves stored for just one week in a bag give you half

the antioxidant benefits of freshly harvested leaves.

- Spinach plants with mid-sized leaves have more phytochemicals than baby spinach.
- Studies show after 10 minutes of boiling, three quarters of the it phytonutrient content will have leached into the cooking water. You'd be better off drinking the water than eating the spinach (and you can tell by the color of the water).



Ask the RD

Dear Mary Beth, Why do you keep harping on ways to lower added sugars? How can something that tastes so good have negative health consequences?

Foods with natural sugars (e.g., fresh fruits or starchy vegetables) were originally a way to prevent starvation during an earlier time period when food was scarce and our ancestors had to work to either find or hunt for food before farming came into existence. Eating foods with sugar and more calories was necessary to prevent starvation and be able to continue the family lineage.

We, however, live in a world where we can easily drive to a fast food restaurant when we are in more immediate need of food instead of having to use the hunt and gather method. With the increase in processing of foods and cheap high fructose corn syrup to sweeten foods, the sugar intake for most Americans is skyrocketing. The average American adult, teenager, and child consumes about 17 teaspoons of added sugar a day, or about 270 calories.

The current recommendation from the American Heart Association is no more

than 6 teaspoons of added sugar (24 grams) for females and 9 teaspoons of added sugar (36 grams) for men because diets that are chronically high in added sugars have been shown to increase the risk of type 2 diabetes, obesity, and cardiovascular disease. They have also been shown to increase chronic inflammation, and both obesity and chronic inflammation increase cancer risk. Sugar sweetened beverages provided the highest concentration of added sugars in American diets, however they do not provide satiety in the same way food does, which can lead to excess energy and weight gain, indirectly increasing the risk for at least twelve types of cancer. (Pan A, Hu FB. Effects of carbohydrates on satiety: differences between liquid and solid food. *Curr Opin Clin Nutr Metab Care*. 2011;14(4):385-390).

The current Nutrition Facts Label on food products includes added sugars, so it's easy to determine how many grams you are consuming in a day. You can also look for sugar or sucrose near the top of the ingredient list for processed foods, which indi-

cates a larger proportion of sugar is in that particular products.

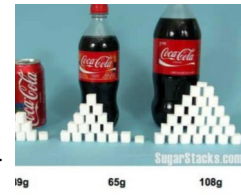
Food manufacturers will also use other forms of sugar.

Research has shown that participants that gave up added sugars for as little as two weeks or who replaced 40% of their added sugar intake with fats, protein, or complex carbohydrates were able to allow their taste buds to adapt to preferring plant-based foods without added sugar to the point that high sugar foods previously consumed were later considered "too sweet" for them to eat.

Think about some ways you can decrease your intake of added sugars for a healthier 2023.

References: <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/carbohydrates/added-sugar-in-the-diet/#:~:text=4%20grams%20of%20sugar%20%3D%201%20teaspoon&text=For%20example%2C%20one%2012%2Dounce,day%2C%20or%20about%20270%20calories.>

Paul M Wise, Laura Nattress, Linda J Flammer, Gary K Beauchamp, Reduced dietary intake of simple sugars alters perceived sweet taste intensity but not perceived pleasantness, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Volume 103, Issue 1, January 2016, Pages 50–60, <https://doi.org/10.3945/ajcn.115.112300>



Balsamic Berry Vinaigrette Winter Salad

From: <https://www.eatingwell.com/recipe/260360/balsamic-berry-vinaigrette-winter-salad/>

Ingredients

- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 Tbsp. plain fat-free Greek yogurt
- 1 Tbsp. sugar free strawberry preserves
- 1.5 tsp. olive oil
- 1 tsp. Dijon-style mustard
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1/4 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/8th tsp. black pepper
- 3 cups fresh baby spinach
- 3 cups torn romaine lettuce

Directions

1. For vinaigrette, in a small bowl whisk together vinegar, yogurt, preserves, oil, mustard, garlic, salt, and pepper.
2. In an extra-large serving bowl, combine spinach, romaine, apple, cheese, pomegranate seeds, and walnuts. Drizzle with half of the vinaigrette; toss to coat. Pass the remaining vinaigrette to individually add to salads.

If you like fruit with your salad, you can add fresh strawberries to your salad to score another fruit serving!

Slow Cooker Chicken, Mushroom, and Spinach Quinoa Risotto

from AICR website at aicr.org/cancer-prevention/recipes/slow-cooker-chicken-mushroom-and-spinach-risotto/

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups quinoa, uncooked and rinsed
- 1 1/2 lbs. skinless, boneless chicken breasts, cut into bite-size pieces
- 3 cups sliced mushrooms
- 3 cups low-sodium chicken broth (plus up to 1 cup additional, if needed at the end)
- 1 large shallot, thinly sliced
- 5 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/2 tsp. each of dried thyme, basil and oregano
- 1 Tbsp. coconut oil or canola oil
- 1/2 tsp. pepper
- Juice of 1 lemon or 2 Tbsp. lemon juice
- 4 cups roughly chopped, packed spinach
- 2/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Instructions

1. Place all ingredients except spinach and cheese in slow cooker.
2. Cover and cook on low for 3 hours.
3. When almost done cooking, the liquid should be absorbed, and the mixture should be slightly sticky. If very sticky, add up to 1 cup additional broth and stir to combine until texture is creamy.
4. Stir in spinach and cheese, cover and continue cooking just until spinach begins to wilt (about 2-5 minutes).

*Quinoa risotto can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 5 days or frozen for up to 2 months.

Makes 6 servings. Per serving: 380 calories, 11 g total fat (4.5 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat), 90 mg cholesterol, 32 g carbohydrates, 37 g protein, 4 g dietary fiber, 280 mg sodium, 2 g sugar, 0 g added sugar.