

Health

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Don't hate your vegetables - you need them

By Rebecca Cohen - Columnist

For many people, vegetables are nasty things to be avoided. We remember our mother telling us that we have to eat all our veggies before we can get dessert or leave the table. We can feel the sensation of trying to swallow those tiny green things that made us gag. We can see the paleness of the cauliflower sitting on our plates. Where's the dog? Maybe he'll eat these things for me!

If you can identify with this image, you're not alone. However, it's important to include vegetables in your daily diet in order to gain their many health benefits:

- Eating a diet rich in vegetables may reduce your risk for stroke and other cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers such as of the mouth, stomach and colon-rectum.
- Diets rich in foods containing fiber, such as fruits and vegetables, may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease.
- Eating fruits and vegetables rich in potassium may reduce the risk of developing kidney stones and may help to decrease bone loss.
- Vegetables are low in calories and will help you lose weight.

Try some of the following tips to incorporate vegetables into your life and learn how to enjoy them.

Prepare and present vegetables in an exciting way. While there's nothing wrong with steamed broccoli or plain cooked carrots, they could be perked up at dinnertime with different sauces, brighter colors and more interesting textures.

Set out a pretty serving tray with one raw and one cooked vegetable. Assemble a condiment tray with several salad dressings, grated cheese, a no-salt seasoning mix and lemon slices. Other options include olive and walnut oils, balsamic vinegar and maple syrup.

Dress 'em up. Garnishes appeal to your sense of sight, and well-chosen ones also boost nutrition, flavor, or even texture. Try topping cooked vegetables with grated Parmesan cheese, sliced red onion, slivered almonds or mild tomato salsa. Sprinkle green salads with pomegranate seeds, chopped walnuts or berries, or add slices of mandarin orange.

Add color. Load a tray with red, yellow, green and orange veggies.

Experiment with marinades. Toss veggies in a low-fat dressing and marinate them overnight in the refrigerator. Serve them cold mixed in your favorite pasta, or throw them on the grill with your other food. Good grilling options include red, yellow and green bell peppers, eggplant, mushrooms, elephant garlic, onion, summer squash and tomatoes.

Try new vegetables. Go to the grocery store or the farmers' market and buy an unfamiliar vegetable. If you're not sure how to prepare it, you can always find recipes on the Internet or in a cookbook at your local library.

Travel the world. One night a week, give your meal an international theme. Some dishes to try:

- Asian-influenced salad with mandarin oranges, water chestnuts, slivered almonds and bok choy.
- Mexican-inspired vegetable tostadas, using crunchy broccoli slaw topped with black beans, shredded cheddar cheese, light sour cream and salsa.
- French ratatouille with olive oil, eggplant, onions, bell peppers, zucchini and tomatoes.
- Italian vegetable-based antipasto.