

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Maybe in the math world $1 + 1 = 2$, but there's more evidence showing that's not necessarily so in the world of cancer and nutrition. Not surprisingly it comes from the researchers studying those strange things called phytonutrients.

Phytonutrients aren't really new, it's just that we never realized that they were good for anything, so they are new in the study of health and nutrition. Basically, a phytonutrient is something that comes from a plant (the *phyto* part), and that does something good for us (the *nutrient* part). We're only starting to figure out what's there, but at least one estimate is that there are over 8,000 different phytonutrients in plants.

One of the earliest to be recognized was lycopene. It's what gives red tomatoes their bright red color. It is found in strawberries and watermelon as well as some other red fruits. It also helps protect us from cancer.

Unlike many nutrients, we actually get more lycopene from cooked tomato products, such as spaghetti sauce, than we do from a fresh tomato. Since most of us don't eat spaghetti sauce every day, one research project was to see if powdered lycopene, in a pill, would give men as much protection from prostate cancer as eating tomatoes. It didn't work. But whole powdered tomatoes did give a little protection to the animals in the study. So, there is more than just lycopene working there.

Another vegetable that shows up often in the diets of the healthiest people is broccoli. There is something in broccoli that also protects men from prostate cancer. It's another one, or maybe several phytonutrients combined. Besides having lots of fiber

and vitamin A and C, broccoli is a great cancer-protection food.

Now in the most recent study researchers from the University of Illinois fed their animals plain powdered broccoli, a mixture of powdered broccoli and tomato, or a drug commonly given to men who have an enlarged prostate that might become cancerous.

While the plain broccoli helped some, the combination of broccoli plus tomato worked very well, even better than the drug! Either tomatoes or broccoli will help protect us from cancer, but the two of them together give the most protection.

Another pair of examples where 1 + 1 equals more than 2 comes from the fruits. Apples are good protectors. Cranberries are even better. But apples and cranberries together give more protection than just adding the two together.

If you've paid much attention to the new Dietary Guidelines, you'll remember that one of the recommendations is to get fruits and vegetables from each of the five different categories. Those are dark greens, oranges, legumes, starchy, and others. The recommendation is not just to make sure your plate looks pretty, or so that you don't get bored. It's meant to help you stay healthy and avoid cancer! Combining tomatoes and broccoli, or apples and cranberries are just two specific examples of how a wide variety of fruits and vegetables does their job.

Some fruits and vegetables do provide more benefit than others. Whole grains also give us phytonutrients. The more variety we put in our diet, the more chance there is that we will give ourselves a super-active combination of protection. And we'll have a prettier plate to look at too!

This week's recipe is a tomato and zucchini combo, easy to prepare and sure to be healthy. Use herbed tomatoes or tomato-vegetable juice for more flavor. Serve it with brown rice or bulgur wheat for another good combination.

Cheesy Zucchini and Tomatoes

1 10-oz can diced tomatoes, plain, Italian or Mexican style 1 Tbsp oil
3/4 C thinly sliced onions 1 ½ pounds zucchini, thinly sliced
½ C tomato or tomato-vegetable juice 1/8 tsp black pepper
½ C grated Parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 350° F. Spray a 2 qt. baking dish with pan spray. Saute onion in hot pan with oil until limp. Add zucchini and reduce heat to low. Cook for 5 minutes. Add tomatoes with the juice from the can, the tomato juice and pepper. Mix gently. Turn into baking dish. Sprinkle cheese evenly over top. Bake 20 min. until cheese is lightly browned. Serves 8-10.

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