

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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February 10, 2011

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Do you prefer yours dried or fried? Kale chips, that is? These things seem to be all the rage recently. Most people don't automatically think "Yum!" at the thought of crispy kale leaves. Yet if you search on-line, there are raves all over for various versions of them. They all seem to be homemade. That might be because they're very fragile and it would be extremely difficult to package and ship them anywhere. And while there's certainly no problem with making more of our food at home, it does mean there's a lot of variability possible.

So, answering questions from callers about their nutritional value is difficult. No one has studied them in the lab yet, to give us any specific quantities of the vitamins or minerals. On the other hand, anything that can encourage kids, or parents for that matter, to cheerfully eat more veggies has at least a few great points!

Kale chips in the most basic recipes are dried, torn kale leaves that are drizzled with oil, sprinkled with salt and baked until they're crisp. But, there are a lot of variations. Some add a lot of salt. Some sprinkle with Parmesan or other grated cheese. Some add a lot of oil. A couple even deep fry the leaves. They're crisp and crunchy, but too fragile to use for dipping. They're just for eating. And they seem to be quite addictive for some people!

We can take some general looks at what's known about nutrients to make some good guesses. First, the amount of oil you choose to use will make a huge difference in the calories. Drizzling just a tablespoon of oil over 4 cups of chopped kale doubles the

calorie count from 136 to 263 calories. If people are really eating them by the bagful, that could add up fast. Deep frying them would add a whole lot more calories.

The other big variable is the salt or seasonings. Add some paprika, cayenne or other salt-free seasoning, you'll be in great shape. A teaspoon of salt has about 1200 mg of sodium. That's most of the daily recommendation of 1500 mg from the American Heart Association! If you go for the cheese toppings, now you're adding sodium as well as more fat. Hmmmm? Be sure to share that bowlful!

Other than the additions, what might the subtractions be? All the minerals naturally present in kale will still be there. They're not destroyed by baking or frying. As long as the torn leaves aren't allowed to soak in water they won't go anywhere. There's not enough carbohydrate in kale to worry about. And unless the leaves are baked until they turn brown the little bit of fiber won't be affected either. If they do turn brown they get bitter. If no one eats them, there's no nutrient value.

Vitamin A is pretty stable when it's cooked. The heat of the oven probably won't destroy it, and might just make it easier for our bodies to absorb. Vitamin C though is different. C is the wimp of the vitamin world. It is sensitive to air, to light and to heat. So tearing the leaves into pieces, cutting out the stem, then laying them on racks and baking or dehydrating them will all hurt the C. By the time the leaves are crisp the vitamin C may well be toast too. The heat of deep frying would probably destroy the vitamin C. The folate will probably be damaged by the heat and air too.

It's hard to say what the baking will do to the other phytonutrients. Things like antioxidants are often destroyed when they're exposed to air and heat. The antioxidant level is probably much lower in kale crisps than in steamed kale.

So all told, while they are definitely an interesting way to eat kale, don't count on them for lots of nutrition. But as an alternative to starchy, greasy potato chips or corn chips, they're definitely better and worth a try. See if you like them.

Here's the simplest set of directions I could find. If you put the dried leaves in a bowl and stir them around to spread the oil over the leaves you'll need less oil and less salt. You'll probably get a more even flavor too. Just don't let them get brown in the oven or they'll be bitter.

### Kale Chips

1 bag kale leaves

1 Tbsp oil

1 tsp seasoned salt (or seasoning of your choice)

Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a cookie sheet with parchment paper. Cut the thick stems out of the leaves and tear the leaves into bite-sized pieces. Wash leaves then dry completely. Pat dry with paper towels if necessary. Spread on cookie sheet. Drizzle leaves with oil then sprinkle with salt. Bake until crisp, 10 to 15 minutes. Check at about 12 minutes to be sure they're not getting brown.