

## **PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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### **'Shrooms for Health**

Maybe your last or closest contact with a mushroom was grade school, with children crying "Ugh, there's a fungus among us!" Or maybe it was finding little white umbrellas growing out of a damp windowsill. But if your most recent encounter with a mushroom was on your plate, congratulate yourself for making a healthy food choice!

As a child, I got to eat mushrooms if we found morels or shaggy dogs growing in the woods around home. Now there are a dozen or more varieties to be found in the local grocery store, and from easy to exorbitant prices, in canned, fresh or dried versions. If you haven't tried one, two or a few recently, there's no time like now to start. They're super low in calories, have plenty of protein, vitamins and minerals, and a surprisingly large quantity and variety of antioxidants.

It's those antioxidants in fact that are getting some people excited. The health message we hear so often is to eat the dark greens veggies, the orange and red ones, all the colors. "Put a rainbow on your plate" is the mantra. Then here come plain old white or brown mushrooms, with very high amounts of not one but several potent antioxidants. It's a big surprise!

Some of the recent research has found that mushrooms have a lot of polyphenols, the common group of antioxidants found in many plant products. But they also have a more unusual one, ergothioneine. This antioxidant is made only in mushrooms and few bacteria. Other plants and animals can get it from them, and we

get it from eating mushrooms, as well as beans or liver. But it's found in many parts of our bodies, especially our red blood cells. That's good, because it's protecting them from oxygen damage. In the blood system it seems to help slow down or prevent inflammation. Inflammation is often blamed for being the root cause of atherosclerosis, gut and bowel disorders, Alzheimer's and diabetes. So mushrooms might protect us!

Are you ready for some mushrooms? Take your pick of these or more. White button mushrooms and their brown versions, crimini (the little brown ones) or portabellas (the big brown ones) have 10 times more ergothioneine than chicken liver. The more exotic mushrooms such as maitake, shiitake and oyster mushrooms all have even more, as much as 4 times more. This antioxidant is not destroyed by heat or cooking. Canned mushrooms will have as much as fresh ones as long as you add the water in the can to your meal.

How do you add mushrooms to your meals? That depends on the kind of mushroom you want to try. White or brown button mushrooms are firm and earthy-tasting. They can be eaten raw, just sliced or chopped into salads. You can bread them and fry them (just not very often or you'll get too much fat!) They add great flavor to soups, stews, rice dishes and casseroles. And of course they can be sautéed in some butter and put on top of your next lean steak. Big portabellas can be grilled in place of hamburgers, or stuffed and baked.

Maitake mushrooms are also called 'hen of the woods' or 'king' mushroom, because a whole one can be a yard across and weigh 50 pounds! You won't need that much, so you can buy it chopped or dried. It's firm, and can be battered and fried, sautéed, baked or added to stir-fry. It can be frozen for later use too. Oyster

mushrooms are chewier. They can be cooked with meats, used in salads or as a side dish. Shiitakes are also large, with a much stronger flavor, so they're often used to add extra flavor to sauces, soups or stews.

Here's a quick pasta dish. It calls for a mixture of mushrooms, but if you want to play it safe with just white or brown buttons, go right ahead!

#### Green and White Pasta

12 oz rotini noodles (or macaroni)	1 Tbsp oil
3 cloves garlic, minced	1 cup chopped onion
1 Tbsp fresh thyme (or 1 tsp dried)	4 Cups sliced mixed mushrooms
2 Tbsp flour	2 Cups low fat milk
2 Cups fresh spinach leaves, rinsed	½ Cup fresh basil, chopped
1 tsp salt, pepper to taste	Parmesan cheese, grated

Cook pasta according to directions. Drain and keep warm. Heat oil in large pan, add garlic, onion and thyme, cook about 1 minute. Add mushrooms, cook about 8 minutes, until soft and juicy. Sprinkle flour over mushrooms and stir well, then slowly add milk, stirring constantly. Increase heat and keep stirring until sauce thickens. Stir in spinach, basil, salt and pepper. Cook until spinach wilts. Add pasta, stir to mix, and serve with Parmesan cheese. Serves 4.