

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Don't Bash All Processed Foods

Contrary to a lot of what you see on the web and hear in the popular press, processed foods are not all horrible things out to kill you. If we only ate pure, raw, completely unprocessed fruits and veggies we would lose out on a lot of good nutrition. And the thought of only eating pure, raw meat would at least keep a lot of people out of restaurants and fast food shops! But there are other reasons to eat and enjoy processed foods.

One big reason for processing is that most of it kills bacteria. That includes cooking, canning and blanching before freezing. The processing also kills molds and yeasts. They'll spoil the food. Some will make us sick. Processing makes many foods much safer, especially as we ship them further and eat them out of season.

Probably the oldest reason why people started processing food, cooking it over a camp fire probably, is that cooking makes it more digestible. That's true from grilling a piece of mastadon to letting a pot of Grandmother's famous spaghetti sauce simmer on the stove for hours. Cooking is processing. There is no natural fountain of spaghetti sauce. Cooked meat, as long as it is not charred, is more easily digested than raw meat. The heat of cooking breaks cells apart, softens tendons and ligaments, and lets our digestive juices get at them. Overcooking however creates cancer-causing chemicals, so don't let the meat char!

Cooking also breaks apart plant cell walls. We can tell if something has been cooked because it is soft. Besides making fruits and vegetables more digestible, opening the cell walls allows us to absorb more of the nutrients, including vitamins and minerals. A recent conference on foods and cancer heard reports of research showing again that cooked foods provide more cancer protection.

One main phytonutrient from these studies was vitamin A and the carotenoids that we use to make vitamin A. Carotenoids are known to be antioxidants, and known to help protect us against some cancers, to help maintain our vision, and possibly help prevent mental and memory decline. Unfortunately, in raw fruits and vegetables they are tied up and not able to be absorbed. But cooking releases them. Mixing, mashing or blending them releases even more. Adding some oil releases

even more.

What kind of things are we talking about here? Red, orange and yellow vegetables are the best sources of carotenoids. So we're talking about the difference between a raw sliced tomato and spaghetti sauce. You actually get more vitamin A and carotenoids from the spaghetti sauce. Canned carrots give you more than crunching on a raw carrot stick. Pumpkins are another good source. We don't usually eat raw pumpkin, but maybe that pumpkin pie does have some redeeming factors. Easy on the whipped cream though!

Another group of cancer-protection chemicals are in the crucifera family of vegetables. These include broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and more. Their protection comes from the same chemicals that give them their distinctive odor – the stinky part. These sulfur compounds are also tied up in the raw plants until they're cut, mashed or shredded. Then enzymes in the plants start chopping away, releasing the odor and the protection. If we boil or bake the veggies the heat destroys the enzymes. But a light steaming, just until they're bright green and still crisp-tender, lets the enzymes keep on working and making the protective compounds more digestible.

Here's a version of cabbage slaw that will give us plenty of cabbage-type protection, but not much vitamin A because the carrots are still raw. This makes a lot, so plan to take it to your next church supper. It's great beside barbeque. Enjoy!

Pepper Slaw

2 cups sugar	1 cup vinegar
1 Tbsp celery seed	1 tsp salt
2 medium heads of cabbage	4 carrots
2 green bell peppers	(1 medium onion optional)

Put sugar, vinegar, salt and celery seed in a sauce pan. Bring to boil, remove from heat and allow to cool. Shred cabbage. Grate peppers, carrots and onion or pulse in a food processor until chopped. (You don't want them pureed, but they should not be too coarse either.) Combine vegetables and dressing in large glass or plastic container and mix well. Refrigerate overnight. Will keep in refrigerator up to a week. Makes about 3 quarts.

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