

PENNY SAVER NEWS

August 8, 2013

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

e-mail: mkeith@ufl.edu

How do you like your Veggies?

How do you like your vegetables - cooked or raw? Some people will only eat theirs cooked. But the raw food movement has lots of support too. Some people can eat a salad and enjoy it, but the thought of cooked spinach has them turning up their noses. And other folks only say "What's the difference? They're all good!"

So, what are the differences? Obviously, cooked veggies are softer. That's a big plus for small children and for people who have trouble swallowing or chewing. All parents know how careful they have to be with their toddlers. A bite of raw carrot could mean a trip to the ER if a small child chokes on it. People with dental problems can love applesauce but wince at the thought of a raw apple.

Cooking also kills bacteria. More and more of the outbreaks of food poisoning are being traced to fresh produce. True, it's great that we're eating more vegetables! But we're shipping our fruits and veggies around the world now. We can get almost anything we want all year long, whether it's being harvested here or not. Shipped from the other side of the world, it can still look and feel fresh when we get it. But with longer shipping come more chances for contamination. And without cooking there is no opportunity to destroy those bacteria. So cooked is usually safer.

In addition, cooking makes some vitamins, especially vitamin A, more absorbable. You get more vitamin A from a serving of cooked carrots than you would from the same carrots if they were still raw. The same holds true for tomatoes and dark leafy greens. Tomato sauce is a better source of A than a slice of raw tomato on your sandwich.

On the other hand, cooking destroys some vitamins. Vitamin C for example is very sensitive to heat and air. So peeling and cooking those tomatoes broke down the vitamin C. Tomato sauce is not a very good source for that. Of course air breaks down vitamin C by itself. Spinach greens zipped up in a smoothie won't have quite as much vitamin C as if they were eaten in a salad. The whirling blender blades beat a lot of air into the mixture.

Minerals on the other hand are not destroyed by heat or air or light. They'll still be present. But how much depends on how you cook the vegetables. If you steam or microwave your veggies, without a lot of added water, all the minerals will be present in the cooked dish too. But if you boil the vegetables, then more or fewer of the minerals will leach out into the water. The more they are peeled, chopped or diced, the more raw surface is exposed to the water, then even more minerals can be lost. If they're in soup and you eat the water, you'll still get them. But if you pour off the water, there go the minerals down the drain.

The other consideration goes back to my first point. Softer cooked vegetables are more compact. They take up less space on your plate and in your stomach. Or, to put it the other way around, you get more veggie in the same amount of space on your plate. For example, one cup of cooked spinach has about the same amount of spinach, and minerals, as 6 cups of raw leafy greens. If you compared 1 cup of raw to 1 cup of cooked, you'd get six times as many minerals in the cooked. Or, you'd have to eat a nice huge bowl of spinach salad instead of one serving of cooked spinach.

So, it still depends on how you like your veggies! If you prefer them raw, you'll need to eat more of them, or less if you prefer them cooked, to get the same amount of nutrition. No matter which way you prefer, just eat plenty of them.

Here's a super simple but surprisingly tasty way to eat your spinach. If you want to add variety, add chopped walnuts or almonds to the mixture instead of pecans. Save yourself a little time by buying the prewashed, bagged spinach. Washing them again is no improvement. Enjoy your vitamins and minerals!

Easy Spinach Salad

1 bag washed spinach greens	1 red apple, washed and diced
¼ cup raisins or dried cranberries	2 Tbsp reduced fat feta or blue cheese
½ cup fat-free raspberry vinaigrette dressing	2 Tbsp chopped pecans

In large bowl toss spinach, apple and raisins or cranberries. Divide into 4 serving plates. Crumble the cheese over the plates, then sprinkle with nuts. Drizzle 2 Tbsp dressing over each plate. Serves 4.

Hillsborough County Extension is a cooperative service of Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners and the University of Florida.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Employment Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M., University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating.