



Life
MADE EASY
NUTRITION

GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR FOOD

Amp up the nutrient value and flavour of what you eat with these storage, preparation and cooking tips. BY SASHA GONZALES

Our experts



JACLYN REUTENS

Clinical dietitian at Aptima
Nutrition & Sports Consultants



SHEENA SMITH

Naturopath and clinical
nutritionist, Integrated
Medicine Institute, Hong Kong

TIP #2:

GO LARGE TO PRESERVE NUTRIENTS

When making a stir-fry, cut your vegetables into sizeable – slightly larger than bite-sized – chunks. This decreases their total surface area, which means fewer nutrients will be lost during the cooking process, says Jaclyn. To retain even more nutrients, cook the veggies until they are crisp-tender, not soft.

TIP #5:

USE THE WATER IN WHICH YOU FLASH-BOILED YOUR VEGGIES

Save the water you used to blanch or flash-boil vegetables. The heat would have leached vitamins B and C, and potassium from the vegetables, making the water rich in these water-soluble nutrients. Jaclyn suggests using this water to make soups or sauces.

TIP #1:

COOK YOUR PASTA UNTIL AL DENTE

Mushy, overcooked pasta is not only unpalatable, its Glycaemic Index (GI) value is also increased. GI is a number used to rate the effects of foods on blood sugar levels.

Jaclyn Reutens, a clinical dietitian at Aptima Nutrition & Sports Consultants, says most pastas have a low to intermediate GI, meaning that they provide sustained energy without causing a rapid increase in blood sugar. But overcooking them changes the quality of the starch, making them more digestible, and turning them into high-GI foods. Your body converts the starch into glucose more rapidly, resulting in that dreaded blood sugar "spike and crash" effect, which can leave you feeling sluggish.

To prevent this, cook pasta until al dente – look for that "bite" or chewiness to it. And to keep the GI value of your dish low, serve pasta with a tomato-based sauce instead of a cream-based one.

TIP #3:

MICROWAVE OR STEAM VEGGIES INSTEAD OF BOILING THEM

Chop, cook, and serve vegetables as quickly as possible to preserve their vitamin C content, says Sheena Smith, a naturopath and clinical nutritionist at the Integrated Medicine Institute in Hong Kong. "They should still have a crispness to them. Broccoli that's been cooked, for example, should still have some shape to it and not turn to mush when you press on it."

Sheena adds that boiling vegetables is not ideal as the process leaches vitamins B and C. And, the more water you use and the longer you cook the veggies for, the more nutrients will be lost. Steaming and microwaving are far healthier.

TIP #4:

SERVE VEGGIES OR SALAD TOPPED WITH HEALTHY FATS

Increase the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E and K in vegetables by topping them with good fats, such as avocados, olive oil, nuts or nut oils, linseed oil or coconut oil.

Cheese is also a good option, but Sheena says to go for cheeses that are naturally lower in sodium, such as mozzarella, Swiss, Colby, and Port Salut.

If you are lactose-intolerant, try an aged hard cheese, which is low in lactose but slightly higher in sodium. When buying cheese, check the ingredients and go for varieties with the least number of added preservatives and colours.

TIP #6:

DRINK COFFEE BETWEEN 9.30AM AND 11.30AM

According to neuroscientists at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in the United States, this window is when your natural levels of the stress hormone cortisol start to drop. Most people's cortisol levels peak between 8am and 9am, and then again between noon and 1pm, and 5.30pm and 6.30pm. So, by sipping on that cup of java when you're "coming down" from your natural alertness peak, you will feel the effects of your coffee more than if you had drunk it earlier.

TIP #7:

PAIR VITAMIN C-RICH FOODS WITH IRON-RICH FOODS

Sheena suggests eating these foods together, as each nutrient maximises the absorption of the other. Vitamin C is a powerful antioxidant and essential for a healthy immune system, while iron is an important mineral for energy, red blood cell production, and providing adequate oxygen to the body.

Ideal pairings: sweet potatoes with lentils, sliced strawberries with baby spinach leaves, spinach with kale, oatmeal with blueberries, and greens with lemon juice.

TIP #9:

EAT THAT FRUIT SALAD AS SOON AS YOU MAKE IT

Don't leave a fruit salad or cut fruit standing for too long, or they will lose their nutrients, says Jaclyn. "Vitamin C oxidises rapidly once exposed to air, so keep this in mind when serving vitamin C-rich fruits like oranges, grapefruits, kiwi fruits and pineapples. To preserve their vitamin C content, eat them as soon as they are cut."

TIP #8:

COOK YOUR TOMATOES AND CARROTS

Tomatoes and carrots are healthy when eaten raw, but you can pump up their nutrient value by cooking them, Jaclyn points out. "When you cook these foods, you break down their fibre walls so they are easier to eat, and make their lycopene – a phytonutrient – and vitamin A more readily available to the body."

TIP #10:

LET CHOPPED GARLIC "REST" FIRST

Don't use garlic right after chopping it. Let it "rest" for a couple of minutes to increase the potency of the allicin in it. Allicin is the active compound in garlic and is produced when garlic is finely chopped or crushed.

Sheena says that allicin is beneficial in the treatment of cardiovascular disease, as it helps reduce atherosclerosis and manage blood pressure. It also has anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial properties, so it helps support the immune system and is a powerful antioxidant.

YOUR FOOD STORAGE MISTAKES

Avoid doing these to minimise food wastage and reduce the risk of contamination.

X Storing leafy greens in plastic bags. This traps moisture and causes the leaves to turn soggy quickly. Instead, separate the leaves, and wash and dry them thoroughly first. Then, arrange the leaves on a row of paper towels, and roll them up to form a tight bundle. Store the bundle in a large ziplock bag; squeeze the air out before sealing the bag.

X Keeping dry goods in their original packaging. This may invite weevils or cause mustiness. The best way to keep grains, pasta, cereals and flour fresh longer, is to store them in airtight glass containers.

X Keeping dented cans. Discard these immediately, as tiny cracks can form along the dents, paving the way for contamination and spoilage.

X Storing food at the wrong temperature. Oils should be stored away from heat – don't arrange your bottles of olive or coconut oil next to the stovetop – and preferably in the cupboard, out of direct light. Delicate oils like sesame can be refrigerated, though. If you want your bananas, peaches, pears and avocados to ripen, store them at room temperature – so just leave them on the kitchen counter – instead of refrigerating them.

Helping Food Last Longer

The latest Door-in-door series from LG makes it a breeze to reach for your drinks and treats as you don't have to open the main fridge compartment. The amount of cold air that escapes is reduced by up to 41 per cent, so you get better energy savings, plus, food stays fresh longer too.

The Fresh 0 Zone in the fridge hovers at nearly 0 deg C to properly chill food, but stops short of freezing it. What's more, there are removable condiment carriers, a tilting fresh basket that gives you easy access to your greens, and shelves that fold easily to accommodate tall items.

LG Multi-door Door-in-door Refrigerator GF-D6011LB, \$5,999, is available at major electrical stores.

