

Nutritional Nuggets

Westchester County Health Department

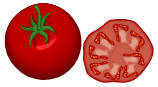
Andrew J. Spano, Westchester County Executive
County Board of Legislators

Joshua Lipsman, MD, MPH, Commissioner

(914) 813-5000

VOLUME II

What's All The Buzz About Phytochemicals?



Put rather simply, phytochemicals are chemicals produced by plants to protect them against viruses, bacteria and fungi.

Phytochemicals include hundreds of naturally occurring substances. Carotenoids, lycopene and isoflavones are some examples of compounds that have received a lot of attention from the media.

♦ Carotenoids - plant pigments that are generally red, orange or yellow. Carotenoids are found in apricots, mangos, cantaloupe, carrots, sweet potatoes and some dark green vegetables (broccoli, kale, romaine lettuce and spinach). Carotenoids are anti-oxidants, which have disease-fighting properties that protect cells from damage. They may also keep the immune system healthy and reduce the risk for cancer.



♦ Lycopene - pigment that gives vegetables and fruits their red color. Lycopene is a strong antioxidant and may lower the risk of prostate cancer and heart disease. Processed tomato products such as spaghetti sauce, tomato juice and ketchup are the best sources. Watermelon and pink grapefruit provide lycopene but in smaller amounts.

♦ Isoflavones - substances found in soy products. Isoflavones may help decrease the symptoms of menopause and reduce the risk for breast cancer, heart disease, and osteoporosis.



Phytochemicals found in fruits, vegetables, legumes and whole grains have been associated with the prevention and/or treatment of some of the leading causes of death in this country. The National Cancer Institute estimates that 1 in 3 cancer deaths are diet related and that 8 of 10 cancers have a nutrition/diet component.



Count on food, not dietary supplements, to provide phytochemicals. Supplements will only provide a few of these substances. It is estimated that there may be more than 100 different phytochemicals in just one serving of vegetables. And there are many more phytochemicals yet to be discovered!

Incorporate more fruits and vegetables into your diet.



Reach for 100% fruit or vegetable juice instead of coffee or soda.



Wake up to fruit by adding chopped fruit to cereal, yogurt, pancakes or muffins.



Keep dried fruit on hand for a quick snack at home or at work.



Add fresh greens, carrots, parsley, tomatoes and beans to soup.



Drink a cup of green tea, high in antioxidants, instead of coffee.





Irradiated Beef: Coming Soon To Your School Cafeteria?

The farm bill that was passed in May 2002 directs the United States Department of Agriculture to buy irradiated beef for the federal school lunch program. However, it will be up to local school districts to decide if they want irradiated beef.

Irradiation uses electrons or gamma rays to kill harmful bacteria in food that can cause food poisoning. This process is often referred to as "cold pasteurization" because it does not significantly raise the temperature of the food. Use of irradiation is controversial.

Supporters say that irradiation is necessary because food poisoning in schools has been increasing. They note that the meat's texture, nutritional value and taste are not changed. There is no evidence that irradiation produces any toxic substances. The American Dietetic Association (ADA) has taken the position that food irradiation enhances the safety and quality of the food supply and helps protect consumers from foodborne illness.

Organic food supporters say that irradiation is dangerous. They claim that vitamins and minerals are destroyed along with harmful germs and that irradiation produces harmful carcinogenic chemicals.

It is important to note that **food irradiation does not replace proper food production, processing, handling or preparation.** Furthermore, precautions must be taken to prevent food from coming into contact with bacteria after irradiation.

Irradiation has been approved by more than 40 countries around the world. It has been supported by many national and international food and health organizations and professional groups. In the United States, manufacturers are required to identify irradiated food sold to consumers with an international symbol (Radura, as shown above) and terminology describing the process on product labels. Food irradiation facilities are thoroughly regulated and monitored for worker and environmental safety.

Recipe Corner

Brown Rice, Lentil, and Barley Pilaf (Source: Weight Watchers Simply the Best)

Ingredients

4 carrots, diced
4 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
1 ½ cups brown rice
2 onions, chopped
½ cup lentils, rinsed and drained
½ cup pearl barley
2 cups broccoli florets
¼ cup minced parsley

Directions

1. In a large nonstick saucepan or Dutch oven, combine the carrots, broth, rice, onions, lentils and barley. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer, covered, until the grains are softened, 30-40 minutes.
2. Add the broccoli and parsley. Simmer, covered, until the grains are tender and the broccoli is tender-crisp, about 10 minutes.

Makes 8 servings.

Per Serving:

| | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| Calories: 255 | Cholesterol: 0 mg |
| Protein: 9 g | Saturated Fat: 0 g |
| Total Fat: 2 g | Dietary Fiber: 8 g |

