

Healthy Meals Made Easy

Roasted Artichokes
Apple, Kale & Cabbage Salad
Spaghetti with Burst Cherry Tomato Sauce

Although summer has not technically ended, fall is definitely in the air, which is the inspiration for today's menu. It features three vegetarian dishes which are colorful, full of flavor and rich in antioxidants. Roasted artichokes, which can be served as an appetizer or side dish are simple to make and delicious on their own. The apple, kale and cabbage salad includes a blend of crunchy vegetables topped with a sweet and tangy apple cider vinaigrette. Rounding out the meal is a quick simple spaghetti dish served with a burst cherry tomato sauce.

What are Antioxidants?

Antioxidants are natural or man-made chemicals which may prevent or repair cell damage caused by free radicals, substances produced from normal bodily functions such as breathing, physical activity or when your body converts food into energy. Free radicals can also be formed from environmental sources such as tobacco, air pollution and sunlight. Antioxidants may control free radicals or convert them to harmless waste that your body eliminates before any damage is caused. They may even help undo some damage done to the body's cells. Fruits and vegetables are rich sources of antioxidants including Vitamins C and E and carotenoids such as beta-carotene, lutein and lycopene. It is important to aim for eating at least 2 ½ cups of vegetables and 2 cups of fruits each day to build and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Food vs. Supplements

Current scientific evidence has not shown antioxidant supplements to provide substantial health benefits. This could be due to a variety of reasons. Differences in the chemical composition of antioxidants in foods versus supplements may influence their effects. For example, eight chemical forms of Vitamin E are present in foods whereas Vitamin E supplements typically include only one of these forms, alpha-tocopherol. The effects from large doses of antioxidants used in supplementation studies may differ from smaller amounts consumed from food. Antioxidants complement each other, thus an excess or deficiency of one may inhibit the benefits of others. Some circumstances make eating healthy, balanced meals challenging which may indicate the need for supplementation. When considering taking supplements, be sure to consult with a doctor or registered dietitian to determine what, if any are right for you.

Antioxidants:

Vitamin C – Benefits include protecting the body from infection, aiding in production of collagen and assisting in the absorption of iron and folate. Vitamin C is found in many fruits and vegetables such as berries, citrus fruits, cantaloupe, broccoli, tomatoes, artichokes and leafy greens like spinach and kale.

Vitamin E – Helps protect your body from cell damage that may lead to certain cancers, heart disease and cataracts as we age. It works together with other antioxidants such as Vitamin C to protect against some chronic diseases. Vitamin E can be found in vegetable oils, salad dressings, wheat germ, whole grains, nuts and seeds.

Beta-carotene – The most widely recognized carotenoid can be converted into Vitamin A in the body. This phytonutrient (natural compounds produced by plants) neutralizes free radicals and strengthens cellular antioxidant defenses. They are generally found in red, orange and deep yellow vegetables such as carrots, pumpkins, sweet potatoes and winter squash, and fruits such as apricots, cantaloupes and papayas.

Lycopene-Supports maintenance of prostate health and is found in many red vegetables and fruits like tomatoes, pink grapefruit and watermelon.

Lutein-Supports maintenance of eye health and is found in green vegetables such as asparagus, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, kale, spinach and fruits like kiwi and citrus.

Featured Vegetables:

Artichokes – The type we eat are actually buds of a purple flower that can grow more than 3 feet tall. Artichokes are native to the Mediterranean but most of the ones we eat are grown in the coastal California region due to favorable conditions. Artichokes have a tough exterior thus careful preparation is necessary. Once boiled, steamed or roasted their tender leaves can be eaten and enjoyed. Artichokes are a good source of folate, dietary fiber and Vitamins C and K. They are listed as number 7 out of 20 on the USDA's top 20 antioxidant rich foods.

Kale – This dark leafy green comes from the cabbage family and is packed with vitamins and minerals. It contains Vitamins A, C and K as well as the B-vitamin folate which is key for brain development. The carotenoids lutein and zeaxanthin give kale its deep, dark green coloring. When purchasing or picking kale, look for dark crisp leaves. Before cooking, make sure to remove the leaves from the tough stalks. Kale is very versatile; it can be added to smoothies, soups, pastas, sautéed as a side dish or roasted for a crunchy snack.

Cherry Tomatoes – These delicious vegetables are an excellent source of Vitamins A and C, a good source of Vitamin K and potassium and contain the phytonutrient lycopene. Cherry tomatoes are also very versatile; they can be enjoyed by the handful, topped with a vinaigrette, roasted or used to make salsa and tomato sauce. When purchasing, choose plump tomatoes with smooth skins free from bruises or blemishes. They are best stored at room temperature away from direct sunlight.

Sources

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