

## **Healthy Meals Made Easy**

The following are a few nutritional highlights from the delicious menu this month.

### Lentils

These quick cooking and easily prepared packets of protein are wonderful to add to any diet as they easily absorb a variety of flavors from other foods and seasonings and they have a high nutritional value. Lentils are most commonly round, oval or heart-shaped disks that grow in pods. When purchasing, consider the shape and color for proper preparation as they may be sold whole or split in half and the brown and green varieties retain their shape best. Lentils are an excellent source of folate and a good source of fiber, copper, phosphorus, iron, protein, zinc, potassium and B vitamins among others! Lentils are considered a high fiber food and therefore help to lower cholesterol levels. Additionally, they are low in calories and high in protein per serving which translates to a nutritionally dense meat alternative that will definitely fill you up.

### Rainbow Chard

Although this vegetable is not one of the most popular, it is absolutely one of the most nutritious and ranks second only to spinach when comparing the total nutrient-richness of some of the healthiest vegetables produced. In order to make this vegetable more palatable and to reduce the concentration of oxalic acid, boil the leaves for approximately three minutes. Generally, the stems are very tough, and discarded instead of consumed. The red and yellow betalain pigments that naturally occur in the leaves have a unique connection to our nervous system health and it is recommended that we eat ½-1 cup of these nutrients at least 1-2 times per week for optimal health.

### Figs

Rich in potassium, figs may help to lower high blood pressure when integrated into a diet high in fruits and vegetables. There are many different varieties of figs of varying colors and textures. To find perfectly ripe figs, make sure to look for firm stems and that the fruit is free of bruises. Also, fresh figs should have a mildly sweet fragrance and should not smell sour which may be an indication that they have spoiled. Fruit that is fully ripened has been shown to have higher levels of antioxidants and therefore be more beneficial in terms of their cancer fighting properties. Make sure to store ripe figs in the refrigerator in order to maintain their fresh flavor for about two days. For slightly under-ripe figs, store at room temperature until they have matured and are deliciously sweet.

Enjoy!