

How to “Produce” a Better Mood

Submitted by Patricia Nelson, Marais des Cygnes Master Food Volunteer

Fruits and vegetables are often touted for cancer prevention, blood pressure reduction and lowering the risk of obesity. There are plenty of studies to support eating more produce. Now new research also indicates that these colorful gems may improve our mood.

Dr. Neel Ocean and Dr. Peter Howley from the University of Leeds and Dr. Jonathan Ensor from the University of York performed this research. The three evaluated data from over 40,000 people in the United Kingdom (UK) and discovered that increased intake of fruit and vegetables were linked to changes in mental health.

In this study, confounding factors that may impact psychological well-being were controlled for, including age, education, income, marital status, job status, lifestyle, and health in addition to intake of other foods like bread and dairy products. The researchers tracked the same individuals over time.

Data from the study showed a positive association between the amount of fruit and vegetables eaten and the subject’s self-reported mental health. What the researchers found was that consuming just one extra serving of fruit and vegetables daily could have the same effect on mental health as walking 8 extra days per month (for a minimum of 10 minutes each time). The research adds to work previously done in Australia and New Zealand.

The authors caution that more work is needed in this area, and the results indicate that those who consume more produce indicate a higher level of psychological well-being and satisfaction with life than those who consume less. Dr. Howley noted, "There appears to be accumulating evidence for the psychological benefits of fruits and vegetables."

From this study based in the UK, we are reminded that better nutritional habits are not only beneficial to physical health in the long run but may also enhance mental health in the short term. It is never too late to change our diet!

Here are a few simple tips to boost fruit and veggie intake:

1. Keep a bag of fresh spinach in the refrigerator and add a handful to eggs, salads, and leftovers.
2. Have a serving of fruit after each meal as “dessert.” Add cinnamon to pears or apples to make them a wee bit fancy.
3. Have a variety of frozen vegetables on hand to save time on meal prep.
4. Add frozen berries to oatmeal, yogurt, and smoothies. They add color, flavor, and antioxidants to simple foods.
5. Toss garlic, onions, celery, peppers, and other vegetables into whole grains. They make side dishes pop with color and flavor.

Below is a spinach salad recipe that has received a lot of positive taste reviews.

Jamie's Cranberry Spinach Salad

Ingredients

1 tablespoon butter
3/4 cup almonds, blanched and slivered
1 pound spinach, rinsed and torn into bite-size pieces
1 cup dried cranberries
2 tablespoons toasted sesame seeds
1 tablespoon poppy seeds

1/2 cup white sugar
2 teaspoons minced onion
1/4 teaspoon paprika
1/4 cup white wine vinegar
1/4 cup cider vinegar
1/2 cup vegetable oil

Directions

1. In a medium saucepan, melt butter over medium heat. Cook and stir almonds in butter until lightly toasted. Remove from heat, and let cool.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together the sesame seeds, poppy seeds, sugar, onion, paprika, white wine vinegar, cider vinegar, and vegetable oil. Toss with spinach just before serving.
3. In a large bowl, combine the spinach with the toasted almonds and cranberries.

Per Serving: 338 calories; 23.5 g fat; 30.4 g carbohydrates; 4.9 g protein; 4 mg cholesterol; 58 mg sodium.

Source: Lisa Andrews, MEd, RD, LD, Foodandhealth.com; For more information on nutrition, food safety, health, or family and child development contact the Marais des Cygnes Extension District Paola (913-294-4306) or Mound City (913-795-2829) offices, or write to fmeastwo@ksu.edu or check out our website: www.maraisdescyignes.k-state.edu