

## **Vegetables: Are they Healthier Raw or Cooked?**

Most people eat vegetables to gain the nutritional benefits. While most vegetables are better eaten raw, there are several that you should cook instead. Cooking releases nutrients that your body can more easily absorb.

The heat involved in cooking some vegetables can destroy some of their nutrients while for others cooking enhances their absorbability.

For example, both beta carotene such as carrots and lycopene in tomatoes are more easily absorbed by the body after cooking. This is because cooking changes the structure of these nutrients' molecules, allowing our bodies to absorb them more efficiently.

Also, if you add some healthy fat to the cooking process, such as olive or canola oil, it also helps add more nutrients.

Here are some examples of vegetables that offer more nutrient value cooked versus raw:

- Asparagus. This wonderful vegetable is full of the cancer-fighting vitamins A, C and E. Cooking asparagus increases its level of phenolic acid, which is associated with the reduced risk of cancer.
- Carrots. Our bodies seem to absorb the beta carotene in cooked carrots more easily than in raw ones. One way to cook carrots is to cut them into rounds, steam them and serve them with a little honey or cinnamon.
- Mushrooms. Microwaving or grilling mushrooms can increase antioxidant activity. Cooking options can include heating them up, slicing and adding them to a salad, or sauteing them and adding them to an omelet.
- Tomatoes. Lycopene is better absorbed when the food item is heated up. This might protect against cancer and heart disease. Cooking options can include slow roasting the tomatoes in an oven at 200 degrees Fahrenheit and then adding them to a sandwich.
- Spinach. Oxalic acid might block the absorption of calcium and iron from raw spinach. Heat is known to break it down. Cooking options can include blanching the spinach and serving it under grilled fish with salsa.

No matter what method you use there are some other considerations to think about when cooking your vegetables.

- If a vegetable has an edible skin such as potatoes or squash leave them on. Many nutrients are concentrated in or just below the skin, and the skin protects the vegetables from losing nutrients during the cooking process.
- When cutting vegetables before cooking, cut bigger chunks. The less surface area that is exposed to heat, the fewer nutrients you will lose.
- Cook vegetables in a loose pile or a single layer to allow the heat to access all the food surfaces quickly and evenly. The quicker vegetables cook, the more nutrients you get.

Source: Ohio State Extension