

HOLIDAY SUPERFOODS -- NUTRITIOUS AND DELICIOUS!

Salute to Sweet Potatoes:

Long on my Nutrition Top Ten, sweet potatoes are to be celebrated at this holiday time. Not even carrots have as much beta-carotene, an antioxidant that may help prevent strokes and certain kinds of cancer. The news gets better: After evaluating 50 vegetables for overall healthfulness, the Center for Science in the Public Interest ranked sweet potatoes near the top. In addition to beta-carotene, they're loaded with fiber and vitamin C and are virtually fat-free. Plus, a six-ounce serving delivers nearly 10 times the U.S. recommended daily allowance of vitamin A.

Cravin' Craisins?:

In the battle against heart disease, researchers are investigating the potential of cranberries. Like other brightly colored fruits and vegetables, these berries are packed with antioxidants and may have some of the same heart-healthy benefits as red wine. Such studies augment new research into the use of cranberries as a remedy for urinary tract infections. Scientists now believe that the condensed tannins in cranberries, rather than the acids, deserve the credit for fending off bacteria, and they're looking at whether these tannins can also fight the bacteria behind gum disease and stomach ulcers. Cranberries are well-known as a vitamin C source: An 8-ounce glass of cranberry juice (look for 100% juice!) has a full day's requirement. And fresh cranberries abound at the market at this time of year!

Fabulous Fall Squash:

Winter squash, which weighs in at only 50 calories per cup, can replace oil or butter in baked goods while delivering a healthy wallop of vitamins and minerals. One cup delivers up to half the recommended dietary allowance of vitamin C and about one-fourth the suggested intake of potassium (a mineral that lowers blood pressure and reduces the risk of stroke). The varieties with the darkest flesh have the most beta-carotene; for instance, one cup of butternut squash supplies enough beta-carotene to meet the RDA of vitamin A, which contributes to healthy skin, vision and bones.

Scent-sational Spices:

Cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg are the flavors of fall. But more than adding a little zip to your cider, spices and herbs can also give food a nutritional boost. Here are a few of my favorite germ-fighting, inflammation, reducing flavors to add to fall and winter meals.

Cinnamon -- Studies have shown that this spice helps regulate blood sugar levels in diabetics. It activates enzymes that stimulate cells, causing them to respond more efficiently to insulin. Cinnamon also contains antioxidants that can help reduce the risk of chronic diseases and has proven helpful in treating colds and congestion.

Cloves -- This pungent dark spice probably isn't used as often as it should be. Studies have shown that cloves contain more antioxidants than any other food and are prized for their anti-inflammatory and anti-clotting properties. Add cloves when baking fall fruits such as apples and pears.

Ginger -- With the winter winds come the sniffles. Some of your best medicine might be a little ginger tea or a few extra ginger slices to go with that sushi. It's well known for boosting the immune system, improving circulation and reducing motion sickness and nausea. Make fresh ginger tea by boiling several thin slices of fresh ginger with honey and filtered water.

Nutmeg -- The ancient Romans and Greeks consumed nutmeg as a type of brain tonic. Modern science has shown that its properties can effectively stimulate your brain and in turn can help eliminate fatigue and stress. What better spice to help you survive the holiday stress?

(Information used from: Pam Smith November 2011 newsletter: <http://www.pamsmith.com/>)