Healthy Changes to Your Diet in the Winter

As the temperature drops, our nutritional needs change. Except for winter-sports enthusiasts, people become less physically active. After all, when it’s cold and snowy outside, even a trip to a neighborhood grocery store is a daunting task. And with the advent of cold and flu season, staying healthy takes a bit more effort. What’s more, nutrition-packed fruits and vegetables that were plentiful during the summer may be in short supply—and take a bigger chunk out of our wallets.

However, there are many delicious and affordable ways to ensure proper nutrition during the dark days of winter. These tips will help you maintain optimum health and please your palate at the same time.

**Go for Beans**

There are many varieties of legumes, including garbanzo beans (aka chickpeas), lentils, lima beans, and pinto beans. These hearty foods have something in common: they are fiber and protein powerhouses. Beans can be added to stews and soups, served in salads, and cooked and eaten by themselves. To reduce gassiness, soak them in water for six to eight hours and rinse before preparing.

**Try Some Spuds**

Potatoes have an undeserved bad reputation for their starch content. However, they are chock full of vital nutrients. One potato provides hefty amounts of immunity-boosting vitamins B6 and C (29% and 25% of the recommended daily allowance of each). Fiber—4 grams in an average-size potato—and folate, essential for the proper development of unborn babies, are added bonuses. Purple potatoes are great sources of anthocyanins, antioxidants with a variety of benefits ranging from keeping heart disease at bay to reducing inflammation. Adding carrots, parsnips, turnips, and other roots vegetables to mashed potatoes is a delicious way to include vegetables in a wintertime diet.

**Talk Turkey**

This bird is not for Thanksgiving only. Low in calories and high in protein, it’s a natural in sandwiches, soup, salads, stir-fry, and by itself.

**Include Winter Squash**

Spaghetti, acorn, and butternut are only a few types of this colorful, tasty, nutritious vegetable. Winter squash is low-calorie and rich in fiber, vitamin A, folic acid, and vitamin C. Acorn squash also has 30% of the RDA of vitamin B1, 25% of B6, and 31% of magnesium. And butternut squash is a powerhouse of vitamins A and C: 179% and 31% of their respective daily requirements. Leave off the butter and syrup and try a little margarine, applesauce, maple syrup, brown sugar, or cinnamon.

**Add Some Greens and Reds**

Chard, collards, and kale flourish in winter; frosty weather can reduce kale’s bitter taste. With healthy amounts of vitamins C, A, and K—and plenty of folate in escarole, mustard greens, and collards—leafy greens can keep people’s immune systems in good shape. Red cabbage, a cousin of kale, contains few calories and lots of vitamin A, plus zeaxanthin and lutein, phytochemicals so important for eye health as people age.

**Don’t Forget Fruit**

Citrus fruit is loaded with vitamin C. Grapefruit, oranges, and their cousins are also excellent sources of all-important flavonoids. Hesperidin, the dominant flavonoid in citrus fruit, is known to raise HDL cholesterol (the good kind), reduce LDL cholesterol, and lower triglyceride levels. And if you have not yet tried pomegranate juice, you may want to add it to your daily regimen. It contains more antioxidants than any other kind. Studies show that pomegranate juice may help prevent free radicals from doing damage—and increase the flow of blood to the heart in patients whose tickers do not receive sufficient oxygen because of blocked arteries.

By adding these good-tasting and nutritious foods to the menu, you can ensure that you and your family will weather the chilly season. Enjoy!