

## Celebrate National Nutrition Month with MORE PLANTS

*Nutrition Newsletter: National Nutrition Month: Spring 2017*

Eating more fresh fruits and vegetables is a common recommendation made by most health care providers. Most tend to hear this so often that they forget to remember why these foods are so vital to health and disease prevention. Read below to get the most recent research that supports why fresh fruits and vegetables are important to our vitality and the different ways they can positively affect our bodies.



***Some Plants Contain Resistant Starch.*** Resistant starch is like soluble fiber in that it is not digested in our small intestine. When this fiber arrives in our colon it serves as food for the good bacteria which help keep the balance of good and bad bacteria and also promotes a higher number of good bacteria. Resistant starch is currently being researched for its potential benefits on reducing colon cancer risk and reducing internal inflammation. You can find resistant starch in sweet potatoes and plantains (hint: after cooking and cooling of the sweet potato the amount of resistant starch increases).



***Plants help Prevent Declines in Cognition.*** Rates of diseases like Alzheimer's and dementia are rapidly increasing and are a threat to many individuals. According to research from the Mayo Clinic, phytonutrients found in many plants, namely deep green leafy vegetables like kale, swiss chard, Bok choy and collards, can help keep blood vessels healthy thus reducing risks of cognitive decline. Eating these greens, cooked or raw versus juicing is preferred so you also get the benefit of higher amounts of dietary fiber.



***Red Vegetables and Fruits help Reduce Cancer Risk.*** The development of cancer is multifactorial. One way to reduce risk is to neutralize free radicals in the body that can cause tissue damage. Lycopene which is a pigment that helps give red fruits and vegetables their color, helps fight and neutralize free radicals and has been shown to help prevent lung, stomach and prostate cancer. Lycopene is found in tomatoes and tomato products but can also be found in smaller amounts in pink grapefruit, watermelon and guava. Lycopene becomes more bioavailable when cooked and paired with a small amount of healthy fat like olive oil or nuts.

***For more information on plant-based diets check out physicians committee for responsible medicine: [www.pcrm.org](http://www.pcrm.org) or the vegetarian resource group: [www.vrg.org](http://www.vrg.org)***

## Tomato & Sweet Potato Soup

*Adapted from Cook for Your Life:*

<http://www.cookforyourlife.org/recipes/tomato-sweet-potato-soup/>



### *Ingredients:*

- ❖ 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ❖ 1 large Spanish onion, roughly diced
- ❖ 1 dried red chili, seeds removed (optional)
- ❖ 1 bay leaf
- ❖ 1½ pounds sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into ½-inch cubes (use ruby or garnet sweet potatoes) 1 (28-ounce) can of diced organic tomatoes 4 cups of low sodium chicken or vegetable stock
- ❖ Salt and pepper, to taste
- ❖ Strained Greek yogurt or sour cream, for garnish (optional)
- ❖ 2 tablespoon chopped cilantro, for garnish (optional)

### *Instructions:*

- ❖ Heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the onions, chili, bay leaf and sweet potato and sauté about 2 minutes. Lower the heat to medium. Cook, stirring from time to time, until both the onion and sweet potato look slightly caramelized and golden, about 10- 15 minutes. Take care not to cook the vegetables too fast or they may burn.
- ❖ Raise the flame to medium-high. Add the tomatoes and cook, stirring from time to time, until the tomatoes have turned orangey-red, about 5 minutes. Add the stock and salt to taste. Stir well and bring to a slow boil. Turn the heat to medium-low and let the soup simmer for another 20 minutes or so until the potatoes are soft and the flavors blended.
- ❖ Remove the bay leaf and puree the soup. If the soup seems too thick for your taste, add a little extra stock or some milk or soymilk to get the right consistency for you. Check the seasonings. Reheat gently.
- ❖ To serve, ladle into bowls. Sprinkle each bowl with a couple teaspoons of the chopped cilantro. Add a dollop of yogurt or sour cream to each if desired.

### *Tips and Tricks*

- ❖ This soup is a keeper – literally. I always keep some in the freezer for those days when I get home late, tired and hungry and want something soothing and tasty in a hurry.
- ❖ If you don't like cilantro, try it with a little fresh mint or basil instead.