

Nutrient Boosters

Just because nutrients are present in your food doesn't mean that your body is actually using them. Some nutrients, antioxidants and phytochemicals are destroyed during cooking or by air or light during storage. Others need the help of your gut bacteria or other nutrients to be activated or to be absorbed. Use these tips to get the most health-boosters from your food.

Cook veggies in little water. In general, cooking vegetables quickly and without bathing them in liquid preserves the most nutrients. Steaming or microwaving veggies in just a few tablespoons of water is a good way to go. Roasting in the oven is good too because it uses no water at all.

Keep the skins on. Fruit and vegetable skins are loaded with disease-fighting compounds.

Chop garlic early. Chopping or crushing garlic activates its natural health-boosting compounds, but heat instantly deactivates them. The solution is simple. Make chopping garlic the first step of your meal prep. Allowing chopped garlic to sit at room temperature for as little as 10 minutes before cooking stabilizes the phytochemicals and protects them from heat.

Give cruciferous vegetables special attention. Broccoli, cauliflower, arugula, kale, radish, wasabi, and other members of the cruciferous family provide us with cancer-protecting indoles and isothiocyanates. Some heat is beneficial, but excessive heat keeps us from grabbing hold of these compounds. Try one of these methods.

- Steam for up to 4 minutes.



- Blanch in boiling water for about 30 seconds.
- Eat a long-cooked cruciferous vegetable with a raw one. For example, enjoy your well-steamed broccoli or roasted cauliflower with a salad made of arugula and radish.

Add some healthful fat. A little fat helps the body absorb fat-soluble nutrients like beta-carotene, lutein, and vitamin K. Just a dab will do, so drizzle olive oil over your salad, add avocado to your sandwich, or sprinkle some pine nuts or almonds over spinach.

Don't fear canned and frozen fruits and veggies. They are protected from nutrient-destroying light and air.

Combine vitamin C with iron-fortified foods. A little vitamin C helps usher iron from fortified foods into your body. Enjoy some strawberries or orange juice with your fortified cereal.

What's most important? Eat a variety of food groups and a variety of foods within each food group. Each food has a unique profile of nutrients and health-boosters.

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