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8-2014

Sweet Results

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Recommended Citation

Craig, Winston J., "Sweet Results" (2014). *Lake Union Herald*. 134.

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HEALTHY CHOICES

Adding one daily serving of green, leafy vegetables reduces the risk of hip fractures.

Sweet Results

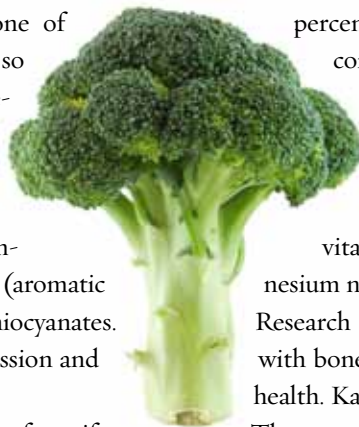
BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Cruciferous veggies provide cancer protection.



Cruciferous vegetables generally are not well liked. They possess a slightly bitter flavor due to their glucosinolates content. However, these compounds provide health-promoting properties. While broccoli and cabbage are the best known cruciferous vegetables, others include Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, kohlrabi, kale, bok choy and collard greens. Different parts of the Brassica plant have been developed for food, including the stems (kohlrabi), leaves (cabbage, collard greens), flowers (cauliflower, broccoli) and buds (cabbage, Brussels sprouts).

Green vegetables are recognized as one of the most inexpensive, reliable sources of so many minerals such as potassium, magnesium, iron and calcium. Cruciferous vegetables are also rich in vitamins A and K, folic acid, and dietary fiber, as well as being a primary source of glucosinolates, compounds which break down to form indoles (aromatic heterocyclic organic compounds) and isothiocyanates. The isothiocyanates decrease tumor progression and promote the death of tumor cells.



A large study revealed that a high intake of cruciferous vegetables was associated with a 15 percent reduction in breast cancer risk. A European study found that those who ate cruciferous vegetables weekly were 72 percent less likely to develop lung cancer. Another European study found that the consumption of cruciferous vegetables at least once a week, as compared with no or occasional consumption, lowered the risk of colorectal and breast cancers by 17 percent, esophageal and liver cancer by 28 percent, kidney cancer by 32 percent, and prostate cancer by 13 percent. Boiling reduces the level of anti-cancer compounds, but steaming, microwaving and stir-frying do not result in significant losses. Heating the vegetable for three to four minutes increases the bioavailability of the phytochemicals.

In a study of 135,000 Chinese adults, those individuals with the highest intake of cruciferous vegetables had a 22 percent lower death rate from all causes and a 31

percent lower death rate from cardiovascular disease, compared to those with the lowest intake of cruciferous vegetables.

Kale exemplifies the value of cruciferous vegetables. At a mere 36 calories, a cup of kale provides about twice your daily need of vitamin A and C, 40 percent of your daily magnesium need, and 10 times the daily need of vitamin K. Research suggests that vitamin K is involved not only with bone health but also cardiovascular and cognitive health. Kale has a high content of lutein and zeaxanthin.

These carotenoids become concentrated in the macular region of the retina, and protect against age-related macular degeneration, the major cause of blindness in the elderly.

Tossed salads can be made more interesting, more healthful, and very colorful by adding to the lettuce, kale or baby spinach, some carrot and tomato pieces, slices of green onions, cucumber and red cabbage, slices of red pepper, as well as some raw pieces of radicchio, broccoli and cauliflower. Adding some arugula gives a distinctive peppery taste.

Health organizations recommend we eat two to three cups of vegetables a day. The health benefits are immense. Adding one daily serving of green, leafy vegetables can lower the risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes by about ten percent. In addition, the risk of a hip fracture and many cancers are significantly reduced.

Winston J. Craig is a professor of nutrition at Andrews University.