

Real Foods that Heal
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Broccoli

Trivia quiz: which modern president became famous for his dislike of broccoli? I'll let you stew over that question for a while, and before we reveal the answer, you will have lots of reasons to feel sorry for the poor man!

Broccoli in the past 30 years has made a move from the back of the pack to near "front runner" status in vegetable popularity rankings. Americans' favorite vegetables are still white potatoes (my advice is to minimize those) and tomatoes (good stuff), but broccoli consumption in the US has increased over 160% since the 1970's according to the USDA. And except for the "anti-broccoli gang" (like our former president), that's really good news for health. The other good news is that broccoli is not even in the top 20 most pesticide laden foods in your produce section, so conventionally grown is still a relatively safe choice (even though I support organic agriculture for all crops).

Broccoli, as a member of the cruciferous (or brassica) family of vegetables, is a great choice especially for breast cancer prevention. Like other vegetables in the brassica family, it is rich in a compound called indole-3-carbinol (I-3-C). Foods high in I-3-C shift the metabolism of estrogen in women to a form that is less likely to promote the growth of breast tumors. Broccoli and its cruciferous vegetable cousins also are able to assist in detoxification of potentially dangerous compounds when they reach the liver, helping to minimize the cancer causing risk of environmental pollutants.

Broccoli is a healthy food in many ways in addition to its cancer preventing properties. It is an excellent source of fiber, vitamin A (as natural carotenoids), vitamin C (one large stalk will provide over 300% of your daily vitamin C needs!), vitamin E (natural tocopherols), vitamin K, B vitamins, and potassium. It also has a very low glycemic index, meaning it does not raise blood sugar in an unhealthy way. And you may be surprised to know that a single serving of broccoli can provide over 300 mg of omega-3 fatty acids, adding to its anti-inflammatory properties. All of these qualities also make it a front-runner for preventing heart disease as well.

All these qualities add up to a vegetable that will get my vote year after year, and I encourage you to protect your own health by eating a healthy serving of broccoli several times a week.

And who was that president? George Bush, Sr. of course, who apparently felt so obliged to clean his plate for his mother that it took becoming "leader of the free world" for him to declare his vegetable independence: "I do not like

broccoli. And I haven't liked it since I was a little kid and my mother made me eat it. And I'm President of the United States and I'm not going to eat any more broccoli." Too bad George. I hope you've been taking your vitamins.

Steamed Broccoli

This simple serving suggestion will take the place of a recipe; I want you to be able to enjoy this delicious health promoter on the spur of the moment without any menu planning.

Find fresh looking broccoli stalks in your produce section, with a dark green top. You can cut off the hardest part of the bottom of the stalk to discard, but save most of the stalk for eating as follows: using either a carrot peeler or a sharp paring knife, peel off the hard outer coat of the broccoli stalk and put the peeled chunks of stalk in the steamer with the sliced tops. This minimizes waste, and the peeled stalks cook just as tender as the tops. Put all the pieces together in a steamer over boiling water, covered, and steam just a few minutes. It is ready to eat when bright green, and still slightly crunchy, not soggy. Season with pepper, or a very small amount of salt, and try to stay away from heavy cheese or cream sauces. The flavor is so good you don't need to mask it with anything.

To your health,

Robert Pendergrast, M.D.

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P.S. Your family and friends deserve to know how to reduce their cancer risk by food choices. PLEASE forward this e-mail to them using the link below.

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