

NUTRITION NEWS

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Fresh NYS Produce

Summer days are long, but the season is short! The local farmers' markets are now in full swing. By now, you're probably aware of the benefits of fruits and vegetables. These include increased fiber intake, additional vitamins, and additional minerals. The farmers' markets make these nutritious options affordable and accessible.

Remember that adding fiber can help your health in a number of different ways. It plays a role in cardiovascular health by keeping your cholesterol at healthy levels. Some fiber can prevent fat and cholesterol absorption, which explains its role in promoting cardiovascular health.

Fiber can also help you maintain a healthy weight. Many high fiber foods are low in calories and nutrient rich. Dietary fiber also includes a type of carbohydrate that our bodies cannot digest. The fiber in this food stays in your stomach longer, which can make you feel fuller for a longer period of time and decrease your overall caloric intake.

Did you know that fiber can even play a role in maintaining a healthy blood sugar level? Because fiber may slow how quickly sugar enters your bloodstream, it can also prevent unhealthy blood sugar spikes that diabetics sometimes encounter.

Keep in mind that foods that are heavily processed or refined tend to be lower in fiber, as the processing removes much of the bran from the grain. Enriched foods have some of the B vitamins and iron replaced after processing, but the fiber is not replaced.

Whole foods (as opposed to fiber supplements such as Metmucil or Benefiber) are also more beneficial.

Summer brings lots of opportunity to try out some of the wonderful seasonal produce, especially produce that our local Farmers' Markets offer. Exact crops and their availability will vary from region to region,



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Single Leg Balance

Stand with feet shoulder width apart. Lift left foot above ground, bend knee and lift the heel halfway between buttocks and floor. Hold for 12 seconds. Repeat on opposite side. Do 3 times on each side.

but here is a list of some of the best options to be found this month.

Apples: most people think of apples as being available in the fall only. But there are some varieties that are ready as early as July! Another benefit to this local produce is that it can be kept in cold storage until spring.

Basil: this herb is mostly used for cooking and is included as a popular ingredient in tomato sauces or pesto sauce. A helpful hint—don't chop the leaves. Tear them for the most flavor.

Blueberries: upstate NY has a bountiful harvest of blueberries! And they can be picked and frozen for use for months to come. Try incorporating them into smoothies, muffins, or pancakes once the cold weather arrives!

Cabbage: cabbage is packed with vitamins and nutrients. It is a good source of both Vitamin K and Vitamin C. Be aware that it may be difficult on your digestive system though.

Cantaloupe: also known as musk melon, this fruit is a good source of potassium and Vitamin C. It is also over 90% water so can be used to meet your fluid needs as well. It is abundant in our area in later summer, is low in calories, and high in fiber— a great snack option!

Cucumbers: one of our state's most popular summer vegetables. Cucumbers are also very high in water content. And they are easy to incorporate into salads. They also contain additional vitamins and minerals.

Eggplant; this dark purple vegetable is loaded with antioxidants. Antioxidants are

thought to be effective in preventing the development of certain cancers.

Garlic: while mostly used as a seasoning, a benefit is that it can be stored year round and used during the cold months as well.

Green Beans: relatively easy to grow, even for amateur gardeners! Young, fresh green beans are a good source of Vitamin C, fiber, folate, and Vitamin K.

Lettuce: one of the few vegetables that is relatively low in fiber. But it is very high in water content and can help you meet your fluid needs during the hot summer months. It is also a refreshing, light dinner on a hot, humid day— simply make a salad and add your favorite lean protein.

Peaches: most people associate apples with NYS but NYS is also a leading producer of peaches! They are a quick, easy snack option, and they are easily incorporated into baked goods as well.

Potatoes: potatoes are available into the fall and winter but can be harvested in later summer as well. They are fat free, sodium free, and about 110 calories each! They also contain more potassium than a banana.

Fruits and vegetables are the foundation of the Mediterranean Diet. A recently published article discusses some criticisms of this diet. Are these criticisms valid?

The Mediterranean Diet was named the “Best Overall Diet” in 2019 by U.S. News and World Report. In addition to a reduced risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and certain cancers, researchers have found that people that follow a Mediterranean diet have a reduced risk of anxiety and depression, im-

proved quality of life in adults with Type I diabetes, and a lower risk of Crohn's disease. So what are the critics suggesting?

The first criticism is that the Mediterranean diet isn't affordable. This is in part due to the cost of fresh fruits and vegetables. With the farmers' markets booming, now is the perfect time to try to incorporate more fresh produce. Animal products tend to be more expensive and since the Mediterranean diet doesn't put a great deal of emphasis on animal products, the cost should be reasonable and feasible for most Americans.

The second criticism is that liquid oils, even olive oil, are unhealthy. While it's true that olive oil is pure fat, it does have nutritional value. Olive oil is rich in monounsaturated fatty acids, which contribute to heart health. It's also important to acknowledge that we are not drinking a glass of olive oil. We may use it to roast or saute vegetables, but in small amounts, olive oil can be beneficial to your health.

Lastly, there is a criticism that says the Mediterranean diet is all about pasta, and we shouldn't eat pasta. While pasta is a staple in some countries that follow the diet, it isn't the only starch used. Among those countries that do use it, most of them cook their pasta al dente, which means it is still firm when you bite into it. When pasta is cooked al dente, it has a relatively low glycemic index (meaning it won't raise your blood sugar as dramatically as other higher glycemic index foods). And any food in moderation is not off limits!

Here's a brief recap of the guidelines for a Mediterranean diet. Focus on vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, legumes, potatoes, whole grains, breads, herbs, spices, fish, seafood, and extra virgin olive oil. Eat poultry, eggs, cheese, and yogurt in moderation. Try to avoid sugar sweetened beverages, added sugars, processed meat, refined

grains, refined oils, and other highly processed foods.

Water is the preferred beverage on the Mediterranean diet. This diet does include, however, moderate amounts of red wine. The recommended amount is about one glass a day. Coffee and tea are also acceptable.

Lastly, it is important to mention that there really is no need to count calories or track macronutrients (such as fat, protein, and carbs) on the Mediterranean diet. This simple approach works because of the foods that are emphasized while consuming this diet.



Mediterranean Chicken Medley with Eggplant and Feta

- 1/2 cup flour
- 1 tbs garlic powder
- 1 tbs paprika
- 1 pinch salt and ground black pepper to taste
- 2 pounds skinless, boneless chicken breasts
- 3 tbs olive oil
- 1 tbs butter
- 1 eggplant, chopped

- 1 red onion, chopped
- 1 zucchini, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 (14.5 ounce) can diced tomatoes
- 2 tbs dill paste
- 1/2 cup crumbled Feta cheese
- Diced dill to taste

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine flour, garlic powder, onion powder, paprika, salt, and black pepper in a shallow bowl. Reserve 1 tbs of the mixture for later use. Dip sliced chicken into the flour mixture to coat both sides. Place on a plate. Heat 3 tbs olive oil and butter in a skillet over medium high heat. Add eggplant and onion and cook until soft and browned, 5 to 10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper; transfer to a baking dish. Cook zucchini and bell pepper in the same skillet over medium high heat until softened, about 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper and transfer to the baking dish with the eggplant. Add additional oil to the skillet and brown the chicken. Transfer to the baking dish. Pour tomatoes into the skillet and add reserved flour mixture and dill paste. Bring to a boil, remove from heat, and pour into the baking dish. Top with Feta cheese. Bake in the preheated oven until bubbly, 30 to 40 minutes. Sprinkle with fresh dill.



HEAP

The HEAP Cooling Program has closed for the 2023 season.

If you would like information on the Furnace Clean and Tune Program, contact the HEAP office at 315-867-1195

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