

# BRUNCH

## VEGGIE SURPRISE

You may think you know your vegetables. But do you really? Most of us prepare and eat them the wrong way. Read on

by Colleen Braganza

**I**F THERE is a right way and wrong way to eat your apples and pears, there is a right way and wrong way to cook and eat vegetables too if you are looking at getting the maximum nutrition. As usual, most of us do it all wrong. But how will you know if you aren't told? Read on.

### GO FOR VARIETY

When you were five, your parents issued dire warnings that you would not grow another inch if you didn't finish all the greens on your plate. But 25 years later, all six feet of you will still pick out peas from peas *pulao* and *palak* from *aloo palak* and put it neatly by the side of your plate. Then, as now, you firmly believed potato was the only vegetable that was worth eating.

You may have gotten lucky, because the lack of greens in your diet didn't affect your health, but if you go by the book, all doctors and nutritionists recommend that you eat a variety of fruits and vegetables to stay healthy.

All doctors and nutritionists suggest you should have at least five servings of fruits and vegetables in a day. The portions differ according to whether you are an adult or a child.

Eating a variety of vegetables ensures you get a variety of nutrients because rainbow coloured fruits and

vegetables are rich in antioxidants, flavonoids, vitamin A and beta carotene, protective substances that occur naturally in food.

"These substances protect us against chronic problems like heart disease, diabetes and arthritis. If you inculcate the habit of eating all colours of vegetables and fruits at a young age, you will lead a healthier life," says Ritika Samaddar, head dietician, Max Healthcare, Saket, Delhi.

### RAW DELIGHT

A 2006 study published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* found that the consumption of salad and raw vegetables resulted in higher concentrations of folic acid, vitamins C and E, lycopene and alpha and beta carotene in the bloodstream. The study proved that salad is one of the best ways to gain nutrition from vegetables.

But is there a good time to eat salad?

Many of us eat salad along with our meals. However, if you are looking to lose weight, eat a

nice, big bowl of salad or drink a big bowl of vegetable soup 15-20 minutes before each meal.

"Doing this helps you curb your hunger a little because it fills up your stomach and you feel full faster," says Samaddar.

How does this happen?



## EAT A VARIETY OF VEGETABLES FOR AN ARRAY OF NUTRIENTS LIKE VITAMINS AND ANTIOXIDANTS



Basically, the stomach takes 15-20 minutes to tell the brain that it is full. So if you eat salad before a meal, your stomach will start sending 'I'm full' signals to your brain by the time you are halfway through your actual meal.

"You can eat a hell of a lot of food in the 15 minutes it takes your stomach to tell your brain it is full. Eating salad or drinking soup before a meal helps because when you finally eat you are not ravenous and do not eat like a glutton," says Rupali Dutta, head, department of clinical nu-

trition, Fortis, Vasant Kunj.

Vegetables good for salad include cucumber, lettuce, green, yellow and red peppers, broccoli, carrots and tomatoes.

Also, if you are looking to lose weight, keep the dressing simple. Eating a low-calorie salad with a calorie-laden dressing is quite pointless.

"Our Indian salad dressing of lemon juice, salt and chillies is quite tasty and almost calorie free too. You can also try a seasoning of a little honey and vinegar or olive oil and



## POTATOES ARE A LOVELY FORM OF FIBRE. COOK AND EAT THEM WITH THEIR SKIN ON

# BRUNCH

## WELLNESS

### DO VEGETABLES CAUSE ACIDITY?



No, say our experts. "There are some vegetables like cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli that have a sulphur content that causes gas. But all fruits and vegetables leave alkaline, not acidic, residue," says Ribika Samaddar, head dietician, Max Healthcare, Saket, Delhi. "You can get rid of the gas in these vegetables if you cook them in an open vessel," she adds.

"Sometimes, if a patient already has an acidity problem, we ask them to avoid very fibrous vegetables as that stresses their digestive system," says Rupali Dutta, head, department of clinical nutrition, Fortis, Vasant Kunj, Delhi.

garlic," suggests Samaddar.

And if you don't have the time to do any of that, eating one cucumber or a carrot or two is certainly better than eating none at all.

#### DON'T PEEL

One of the biggest mistakes we make while preparing vegetables is peeling them ruthlessly. Like fruits, the nutrition in a vegetable lies in and just below the skin. "As you go inside a fruit or vegetable, you find more starch. The fibre, minerals and vitamins are present in and just below the skin," says Samaddar.

"Thus, once you peel a cucumber, *lauki* or potato, you lose most of its benefits."

Samaddar suggests at the most you should simply lightly scrape the vegetable. "It will taste much better

and you will get all the nutrition too." She adds that potatoes are a lovely form of fibre and should be cooked and eaten with their skin on after scrubbing them thoroughly.

Fibre is important for our bodies because in these days of processed food, vegetables give us excellent insoluble fibre that aid bowel movement.

#### OVER WASHING

Besides our fondness for peeling fruits and vegetables, we are also obsessed with washing them at every stage: before we peel them, after we peel them and after we cut them.

When we wash vegetables, especially peeled and cut vegetables, most of their nutrients are also washed away, defeating the purpose of eating vegetables. "Most vitamins



### VEGETABLES GOOD FOR SALAD INCLUDE LETTUCE, GREEN, YELLOW AND RED PEPPERS, TOMATOES AND CUCUMBER

and minerals present in vegetables are water soluble. So when you cut them and wash them, vitamins like vitamin B complex and C are washed away," says Samaddar. Washing vegetables thoroughly once before cooking them is good enough, she says.

#### STORAGE

Strapped for time, many of us tend to buy vegetables in bulk for the whole week. But if you are looking at gaining the maximum nutrition, always buy and cook only as much as you need because vegetables deteriorate even if they are stored in the fridge, especially if you wash them first. "Store vegetables in the fridge for no longer than a day or two," says Samaddar.

If you shudder at the thought of

buying vegetables every day because you just don't have the time, store them in ziplock bags because they will retain their nutrition slightly better.

#### QUICK COOKING

We all also like our food well done. So we love to simmer our curries and vegetables for hours over the fire. But if you want your vegetables to retain their nutrition, the less they stay on the fire, the better it is, say our experts.

"Cooking vegetables in a pressure cooker helps retain more nutrition because the vegetables are done in a few minutes. It doesn't taste as good as vegetables cooked in the *kadhai*, but pressure cooking helps retain their nutritional content," says Samaddar. The Indian tradition of cooking with ample spices also faces competition by a school of thought that feels the stir fry-no masala style is much healthier.

But though steaming and stir frying help vegetables retain most of their nutrients, adding spices and condiments while cooking has benefits too.

"Turmeric, onion, garlic and chillies have anti-bacterial qualities. Spices like *jeera*, *ajwain* and cardamom are digestives that prevent the formation of gas," says Dutta.

Also, if you think eating blanched vegetables is also very healthy, think again. When you blanch vegetables, their vitamins and minerals dissolve in the water they are blanched in.

"It is much better to steam vegetables instead. If you blanch them, always use the stock that is created as most of the vegetable's nutrients are left in the water," says Samaddar.

[cbrazanza@hindustantimes.com](mailto:cbrazanza@hindustantimes.com)