

# Crestwood Behavioral Health Inc.

## Nutrition and Wellness

### News



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## The Case for Flexitarianism

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- To Cook or Not to Cook* 2
- The Importance of Others to our Health* 3
- Curried Carrot Soup* 4

Most of us know that eating a plant-based diet is good for our health, more humane, and better for the environment. Vegetarian diets have been linked to lower incidences of heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers. Whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, fruits, vegetables, and responsibly-raised eggs and dairy products are nutrient and fiber-rich, and easier on the environment to produce than most meat products. In addition, most animals raised for consumption are raised under pretty deplorable conditions. Even so, for many people, vegetarianism can be a hard lifestyle to follow. It can be hard to find meat-free options when eating out or in a rush and some worry that they will miss out on key nutrients by not eating meat. But is it also possible to eat an unhealthy vegetarian diet?

A very large recent study by researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health examined the effects of eating a healthful plant-based diet and one that contains less healthful plant-based foods. A diet was described as healthful when it included legumes, vegetables, fruits, whole grains, coffee, and tea, while the less healthy was characterized by more sweetened beverages like soda, refined grains, potato products, and sweets. The researchers found that participants who had the less healthful diet were 32% more likely to be diagnosed with heart disease than those who chose healthier plant-based foods. In a similar study, they also found that those consuming healthier plant-based diets were less likely to develop type 2 diabetes.

This is because there are plenty of unhealthy foods that are technically vegetarian. Lots of refined carbs and unhealthy fats are found in



foods such as white bread, doughnuts, candy, soda, and French fries, which are all meat-free. A vegetarian must also make sure to get enough of the nutrients that are often found in high quantities in animal products, such as protein, vitamin B12 and iron.

If going completely meat-free is too big of a challenge for you, consider becoming a flexitarian. A flexitarian is someone who eats vegetarian most of the time, but occasionally eats meat. Make sure your vegetarian meals contain whole grains such as brown rice, whole wheat bread, barley, quinoa, or buckwheat, for example. Make at least half of your plate vegetables and fruits with a variety of colors. Beans, nuts, seeds, and soy products all make great sources of protein, as do good-quality dairy products such as real yogurt and cheese. Cook with plant oils for a nice dose of healthy fats. When you do choose meat, fish or lean poultry are great choices. And responsibly-raised red meat such as beef and pork can be included on occasion as well.

Start out by going meatless a few days a week, or allow yourself meat just on the weekends. One popular food writer, Mark Bittman, is "vegan before 6pm", meaning that until 6pm at night, he eats no animal products, but lets himself include meat or dairy in dinner. Another approach is to use small amounts of meat, but not make meat the main focus of the meal. If most of us ate vegetarian, even most of the time, the impact on public health and environmental health would be huge, so if going vegetarian is too daunting for you, try going flexitarian instead.



# To Cook or Not to Cook?



Some people believe that the healthiest way to eat is to consume only raw foods. Eating raw fruits and vegetables certainly has health benefits, since these foods are high in vitamins, minerals, and fiber. However, many foods must be cooked to be properly digested, and some nutrients may even become more available--or more easily absorbed--by our bodies with some light cooking.

Cooking method, cooking medium, cook time, and whether the vitamins are water- or fat-soluble, are all factors that will affect how and where nutrients in food will end up. Most vitamins are large, complex molecules, and they will be broken down the longer they are exposed to heat, so long cooking times can reduce the amount of vitamins like vitamin C. In addition, water-soluble vitamins like vitamin C, the B vitamins, including folic acid, may end up in the water used to cook fruits and vegetables. Fat-soluble vitamins are probably retained a little better when foods are cooked in water. Keep in mind, though, that fat-soluble vitamins, like A, E, and D, require some fat to be absorbed well by the body. Minerals are generally not altered by cooking, but can be lost to the cooking medium.

Boiling will probably have the greatest effect on nutrients, with a lot of them ending up in the cooking liquid. Stir frying or sautéing will cause less nutrient loss for most vegetables. If you are steaming vegetables, consider steaming them whole or cut in large chunks to minimize surface area. Use a small amount of water, and if possible, add the cooking water to something else, such as a soup or a sauce. Some vegetables, such as beets or swiss chard, yield brightly colored, nutrient-rich cooking liquid. Try adding a sprinkle of salt and a squeeze of lemon, and drinking them like a hot beverage.

Some foods actually become more nutritious with a little cooking. The nutrients in fruits and vegetables are inside tough plant cell walls, and sometimes a little heat helps break those walls down to release the nutrients that our bodies need. Carrots, for example, are an excellent source of beta-carotene, the precursor of vitamin A in our bodies. Vitamin A is important for vision and immune health, as well as healthy skin. Raw carrots are high in fiber and will provide some beta carotene, but research has shown that cooking carrots actually increases the amount of beta carotene your body can absorb.

Tomatoes contain lycopene, a powerful antioxidant that may protect against multiple cancers and help prevent heart disease. However, only a small amount of that lycopene is absorbable from raw tomatoes, due to the tomato's thick cell walls. Lycopene stands up well to processing, and is concentrated in products like tomato sauce, ketchup, and tomato juice. But just cooking your tomatoes can increase the availability of this nutrient. For even more good news, lycopene is fat soluble, and studies show that adding olive oil greatly increases the body's ability to absorb it.



In summary, to retain the most nutrients in your cooked vegetables, lightly steam them or quickly sauté or stir fry them. If you do have cooking liquid left over, consider adding it to something else, or even just drinking it. To best absorb fat-soluble vitamins, eat them with a little fat such as olive oil. And vitamin A, found in carrots, pumpkin, and other orange fruits and vegetables, and the powerful antioxidant lycopene, found in tomatoes, is actually more easily absorbed by our bodies when these foods are cooked. So enjoy your pasta with some tomato sauce and olive oil!

# The Importance of Others to Our Health

When we think of factors that affect our health, we usually think of diet, exercise, avoiding habits like smoking and excessive alcohol use, decreasing stress in our lives, and even getting enough sleep. Another important factor that is often overlooked is the connections we have with family, friends, and community. In fact, new research is emerging that suggests social isolation can be bad for health. Elderly people who are socially isolated are twice as likely to die prematurely. Research even suggests that loneliness is worse for one's health than being obese, and as deadly as smoking. Inadequate social interaction impairs immune function and increases inflammation which can increase risk of diabetes and heart disease. To make matters worse, it can feel embarrassing, even shameful, to admit one is lonely, especially in a society in which abundant social relationships are publicized on social media sites like Facebook.



What can be done to reduce social isolation in ourselves and others? For the elderly, there may be community or religious groups that they can be encouraged to take part in. If they are able, pets, especially dogs, can get people out of the house for exercise and social interaction. If you know of an elderly relative or neighbor, perhaps reach out to them and ask them if they need a ride to the grocery store or help with yard work.

Since the 1980s, the number of American adults who report being lonely has doubled to 40%. About a third of adults over 65 live alone, and about half of those over 85 live alone. Because of the stigma attached to being lonely, many people are reluctant to admit feeling lonely. Research suggests that loneliness is usually not the result of poor social skills. Loneliness can be due to circumstances, like moving to a new area, ending a marriage, or losing a loved one. Research shows that when people experience chronic loneliness, it may change how they perceive social interactions, which can lead to further loneliness. Ambiguous social cues are more likely to be viewed as negative or hostile, causing the person to withdraw and exacerbating the problem.

Many other factors in today's society can also create loneliness. Instead of living in multigenerational households, like many other cultures do, most Americans live independently, until the time they are married and raising children. As people age and their children leave home, marriages may end or spouses may pass away, leading again to solitary living. Relocating for work may lead to career advancement, but also separates people from friends and family. And while social media may make it seem like we are connected to many people, electronic interactions do not seem to have the same effect on health that in-person interactions do. Today, people can stay in touch with others via social media and email, shop online, do research online, and even work from home. This can greatly reduce the number of real human interactions, however basic, a person might have in a day.

Ironically, even though our dependence on the internet may in some ways increase social isolation, in other ways it may help ease it. There are many ways to connect with people online that can lead to real life interactions, such as online dating and meet-up websites that connect people with shared interests. There are also sites that enable users to trade tasks and encourage a sense of community and belonging. For example, linkAges ([www.community.linkages.org](http://www.community.linkages.org)), is a website started by a doctor in Palo Alto, that allows people to offer services to others and bank the time. One user may offer to walk someone's dog for an hour and bank that time. In return, they may have another user give them an hour-long guitar lesson. The goal of this program is to create cross-generational exchanges of services and skills, to create a sense of community and usefulness for its users.

Even when we are with others, many people now spend a lot of time on their phones or other electronic devices, checking email, texting people who are not present, and checking social media. To reduce feelings of loneliness, try to be fully present when with others by putting the phone away, and encourage others to do so as well. Making the most of the interactions we do have, can strengthen social bonds and make us feel less lonely. Mealtime is an especially good time to practice being fully present with others. There is ample evidence that eating together as a family is good for kids—they are less likely to be overweight, they get better grades in school, and they have better school attendance. Eating together also has health benefits for adults. People who eat with others tend to make healthier food choices, and spending time with others over food helps establish social connections and gives one a sense of belonging. Research suggests eating with co-workers can actually boost productivity, improve working relationships, and build comradery among co-workers. So put the phone away, and sit down to eat with whoever you can, be it family, friends, or co-workers, to improve your health and sense of well-being.

## Curried Carrot Soup

This is a soup that has been in the Crestwood Heart Healthy menu cycle for several years. It is rich in beta carotene due to the carrots, and hearty and warming due to all the spices.

- 3 tbsp margarine, butter or oil
- ½ tsp. curry powder
- 1/2 tsp ginger, ground or fresh
- 1 tsp turmeric
- 6 cups carrots, peeled and chopped
- 2 cups celery, chopped
- 1 cup onion, chopped
- 4 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 tsp lemon juice
- 4 tbsp plain yogurt or sour cream
- A few sprigs of cilantro, parsley, or basil, if desired

In a large pot, heat the oil, butter, or margarine. Add the spices and sauté until fragrant. Add the onions, and sauté until they start to soften. Add the carrots and celery, stir, and sauté a few minutes more. Add the broth and bring to a simmer. When the carrots are tender, puree with an immersion blender or food processor until mostly smooth. Stir in the lemon juice and ladle into bowls. Garnish with yogurt or sour cream, and fresh herbs, if desired.



***“If you really want to make a friend, go to someone's house and eat with them... the people who give you their food, give you their heart.”***

*-Cesar Chavez*



### **Any Nutrition and Wellness News Questions?**

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