

The Perfect Cancer-Fighting Salad

The healthiest ingredients to toss in every time.

From Prevention.com



When it comes to your health, not all salads are created equal. In fact, many takeout and restaurant salads are essentially calorie bombs disguised as health food—drenched in creamy, caloric dressings and missing key nutrients with powerful disease-fighting potential. Next time you make your own salad, here's exactly what to include for maximum health benefits—and taste.

1. Start with dark, leafy greens

For the healthiest salad foundation; stick with a mix of spinach, arugula, and romaine. They contain a hefty amount of the B vitamin folate, which has been shown to reduce the risk of getting colorectal, ovarian and breast cancers. In one study, researchers at Vanderbilt University found that women who ate the mostly dark greens were among the least likely to get breast cancer. Apparently, folate can halt changes in DNA that trigger runaway cell growth, the main characteristic of cancer.



Add shredded carrot

If you're already using this salad staple, good! If not, embrace your inner rabbit and make it a must-eat. In a study from Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, women who ate just five servings of four raw carrot sticks a week had a 54 percent decrease in their risk of getting ovarian cancer, compared with women who ate them less than once a month. Carrots may also reduce your risk of kidney cancer.



Slice up some tomatoes

Not only do tomatoes add juicy flavor, their powerful lycopene—the plant chemical that gives them their color—is a major cancer enemy. German research on 165 colonoscopy patients found that those who had the lowest blood levels of lycopene had the highest rate of colorectal adenomas, a precursor to colorectal cancer. Toss a few tomatoes into your guy's salad: They also reduce the risk of prostate cancer.

For an even healthier lunch, buy orange tomatoes. Research shows that they provide more lycopene than their red-hued relatives do.



Heap on beans

A variety of beans, like black, white, kidney, etc., will fortify your salad with craving-quenching protein and some tasty texture, which can help bust a “salads are boring” lunch rut. Even better, women who ate beans at least twice a week were 24 percent less likely to develop breast cancer than those who ate them less often, report Harvard School of Public Health researchers who analyzed data from 90,630 people. Legumes may lessen risk of breast cancer, thanks to their ability to suppress the production of enzymes that encourage tumor growth.



Fold in fish

To give your greens a heartier flavor—and a surprising synergistic health boost—go wild with salmon. When B6-rich foods (like salmon) are eaten with folate-filled foods (dark leafy greens), they can help reduce the recurrence of colorectal adenomas by 39 percent, a University of Arizona study found. Salmon may also help shield regular eaters from skin cancer, according to British research.



Add avocado

Healthy as they are, vegetables have an unexpected downside. Many of them are virtually fat free, and you need fat in the meal to absorb cancer-fighting carotenoids. That's where smooth, creamy avocado comes in. In Ohio State University research, volunteers were given a salad either with or without 3 tablespoons of avocado. Blood tests showed that those who ate the avocado got 4.3 times as much lutein, 8.3 times as much alpha-carotene and a whopping 13.6 times as much beta-carotene as those who ate salad without it.

But avocados are a bit high in calories. To avoid weight gain, use avocado in place of another high-fat topper, such as cheese.



Splash on vinaigrette

Mixing your favorite vinegar with olive oil can also help prevent breast cancer. Scientists from Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine found that oleic acid in olive oil dramatically cuts the levels of the cancer gene Her-2/neu, associated with highly aggressive breast tumors with poor prognosis.



Garnish with citrus peel

It's like eating sunscreen but tastes better. Limonene—a compound that gives oranges, lemons and limes their scent—is linked to a 34 percent reduction in skin cancer, according to a University of Arizona study of 400 people.



Skip the croutons

If you eat a lot of foods with a high glycemic load—a measurement of how quickly food raises your blood sugar—you may run a higher risk of colorectal cancer than women who eat low-glycemic-load foods, found a Harvard Medical School study involving 38,000 women. The problem eats are mostly white: white bread (including croutons), pasta, potatoes and sugary pastries.