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What is missing in the typical American diet and how do we fix it?

20 Important Facts You Need to Know

If I told you that your diet - if you're eating like an average American - is missing the following crucial vitamins and minerals, and one food would cover all your bases, would you be interested?

Americans have access to a great variety of foods, some grown locally, and some grown from far reaches of the world. Yet, the typical American's plate is loaded with heavily refined grains, and foods with added fats and sugars, and too much meats and poultry.

Lack of exercise plays an important part in the US mounting obesity epidemic, but our consumption - and overconsumption, in most cases - is a primary impact on our health. Diet affects weight, but it also greatly increases the risk on a substantial level of chronic illnesses such as type-2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Sweets and sodas, in that order are responsible for two of the top five sources of calories, yet offer very little in the way of nutritional value for the body. Incorporating a decrease in the intake of these two items can help decrease caloric intake, thereby help to maintain a proper weight.

Convenience foods, including all meals eaten out and foods in your grocery store that help you cut corners in meal prep, are another major adversary to healthy bodies.

Such foods are almost always very high in sodium, saturated fat, and added sugar, as well as offering little to no nutritional value.

Meat consumption for Americans is about 270 pounds per person each year, second only to Luxembourg. Poultry consumption is about 100 pounds. Both are high in saturated fat, which dangerously raises blood cholesterol levels, increasing the risk of heart disease.

1. WHAT ARE YOU MISSING?

According to scientists and medical professionals, Americans are sorely lacking calcium, potassium, and the following vitamins: A, D, E, and K. Our poor diets have terrible consequences.

Have you been to a farmer's market lately? Most are chock full of a leafy green superfood from the cabbage family. This superfood is loaded with nutrients.

Go to any health food counter, and you'll see an abundant variety of green smoothies and superfood shakes. The most common ingredient is our friend from the cabbage family. People are quickly discovering all around the world that this superfood can help curb unhealthy cravings, not to mention, boost their immunity. This ingredient even has been found to be an excellent meal replacement for busy people on the go.

Enough of the suspense. Meet kale.

2. ABOUT THIS BENEFICIAL SUPERFOOD

Kale comes from the same wild cabbage family as broccoli, cauliflower, and collards. Kale, this leafy green vegetable is a humble member of this illustrious group of cancer-fighting cruciferous vegetables and is quickly becoming one of the most popular health foods today.

Kale does far more than fulfill your nutrient-poor diet. Research is indicating that kale provides overall cardiovascular support, and tests are showing it's not just improving blood cholesterol levels. Steamed, it offers some unique cholesterol-lowering benefits.

When kale is steamed, your digestive tract works better because the kale's fibers bind together easily with bile acids. This action makes it easier for bile to be excreted, which naturally helps to lower your cholesterol levels. Raw kale works almost as well as steamed.

Drinking as little as 5 ounces of kale juice every day for 12 weeks has been found to dramatically lower the risk of coronary artery disease, as well as raise the HDL levels while lowering LDL levels, a perfect formula for healthy hearts.

And we haven't begun to discuss the other health benefits, such as how it helps with diabetes and depression, and so much more!

Kale is in the stores all year, but it's in season from winter to spring. It's an excellent choice to eat during the time many other healthy choices aren't available as they are out of season.

3. IT'S HISTORY

Historical evidence indicates that kale was used in Roman and Greek times and was considered a cure for drunkenness. Like many so-called "old wives' tales," there may indeed be some truth to it. Scientists are finding that the ITC's made from kale's glucosinolates - fundamental components of pungent plants, such as mustard, and our friend, kale - can even help regulate and detox at a genetic level. Kale is now being recognized as contributing to support the body's detoxification system!

Kale spread to Europe and Asia around the Middle Ages and eventually was found here in America. It wasn't until when a guy named Tim Peters began cross-pollinating kale with bees in the 1980's, did the vegetable get any attention. From that time on, several varieties were developed, and its popularity grew.

Technically speaking, kale comes from the Acephala group of the Brassica oleracea species that, as was mentioned, includes collard greens.

4. ITS VARIETIES

There are three main varieties of kale: one that has green leaves and one that has purple, and the third is ornamental. Ornamental kale is very popular in traditional landscapes. This variety is edible as well as having brilliant blues, reds and white interiors.

Curly kale, the most commonly available variety, has tightly ruffled leaves and a dark green hue. It has a very pungent flavor, and its leaves are easy to tear. The ornamental kale is much more subdued in flavor. Tuscan kale has dark blue-green leaves that appear to have an "embossed texture"; its taste has

been described as being slightly sweeter and more delicate than curly kale. Kale is said to be like cabbage but has a fresher flavor, is earthier, and even greener.

To those with sensitive noses, a warning: kale isn't exactly a pleasant, or friendly fragrance. It has a sharp odor and has an almost peppery, spicy taste.

Other more well-known members of the Brassica family are Arugula, Bok Choy, Broccoli, Brussel Sprouts, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Mustard Greens, Radish, Turnip, and Watercress.

5. HEALTH BENEFITS

This family is popular for the following benefits:

- " Anti-inflammatory
- " Contain antibacterial and antiviral properties
- " Inactivates carcinogens
- " Reprograms cancer cells to die-off
- " Prevents tumor formation and metastasis

You'll definitely want to include kale as one of the vegetables you eat on a regular basis if you want to receive all of the fantastic health benefits provided by the cruciferous vegetable family. It is recommended that we consume a minimum of $\frac{3}{4}$ cup every day, or 5 cups a week. To get the full benefit, you should eat about 10 cups a week or about 1-1/2 cups per day.

If you're not convinced, read on!

6. HOW TO EAT

One cup of raw kale has just 33 calories, yet it contains a whopping 684% of vitamin K, 206% of vitamin A, 134% of vitamin C, calcium, iron, magnesium, folate, fiber, iron, and 2 grams of protein, plus omega-3s.

There are many ways to cook kale. To determine the healthiest way for you depends on which of its many benefits you want more of. As mentioned, when steamed, it's a perfect cholesterol aid as well as digestion.

The more kale is exposed to heat, air, and even light, the greater it produces vitamin C. To increase calcium in kale, it should be gently steamed or sautéed, which further helps increase your vitamin intake.

Steaming kale for 5 minutes retains its health benefits. To be sure it's cooked evenly, cut the leaves into $\frac{1}{2}$ " slices and cut the stems into lengths of about $\frac{1}{4}$." Some scientists advise allowing the stems and slices to sit for about 5 minutes just before cooking, but that has not yet been proven as having significant benefits.

7. ENJOYED ALL OVER THE WORLD

Kale is an Old-World food and is eaten across virtually the entire globe. It is a staple in Scotland, Denmark, Italy, Kenya, Portugal, and many other countries. Besides its endless health benefits, kale is easy to prepare in just under five minutes.

8. GREAT FLU-SEASON FOOD

Here is another reason why you should stock up kale in the refrigerator during flu season. A regular sized orange weighs 131 g, while a whole cup of kale weighs only 67 g. In that one cup of kale, you have 134% of your daily recommended Vitamin C allowance, as compared to that orange which has a measly 113% of your Vitamin C. Gram for gram, kale has more than twice the vitamin C found in an orange!

9. FATIGUE, MUSCLE ACHES, BLEEDING GUMS?

If you suffer from chronic bouts of fatigue, muscle aches, and bleeding gums, the culprit is likely not enough vitamin C. These symptoms are just a few of the symptoms for low vitamin C. Vitamin C is a strong antioxidant. It's also popularly known as ascorbic acid. Vitamin C helps to resist the common cold and it also helps the body form. Kale contains more vitamin C than do oranges!

10. BETTER THAN PROZAC?

The Cheesecake Factory, that haven for calorie-dense decadence, has recently added our humble little friend to the menu. That's right; kale is in the house!

Many medical professionals are now claiming that the nutrients in kale actually help make us feel more optimistic, so much so, that it wards off depression. Unlike Prozac, vegetables like kale improve the lives of all those millions of beneficial microorganisms that live in our guts. Eating kale keeps us healthy, and therefore, fights depression.

Eating kale helps improve your mood because of its phytonutrients molecules. These molecules - also found in pumpkin, squash, and strawberries - produce carotenoid. Harvard University linked eating carotenoids to an uplifted mood.

Kale is also rich in omega-3 acids, which is known to fight symptoms of depression. Kale's strong combination of protein, iron, folate, and vitamin B6 work together to create more serotonin and dopamine. These two chemicals, serotonin, and dopamine, interact in the brain in positive ways and helps to elevate mood. A patient with depression reports that kale, along with her other therapies, has helped her become more stable in significant ways.

11. LOADED WITH OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS

Kale is a great source of alpha-linoleic acid (ALA), the omega-3 fatty acid that is known to be essential for brain health, boosts heart health, and reduces the risk of type 2 diabetes.

Omega-3 fatty acids include an extensive range of health benefits, such as treating rheumatoid arthritis, and reducing the symptoms of bipolar disorder, increasing cardiovascular health, and lessens the risk of sudden death for patients who have experienced a heart attack.

12. GOOD FOR YOUR BRAIN

Kale has at least 45 different flavonoids, thus being able to significantly reduce the risk of stroke. It also contains 7% of daily iron needs. Iron helps in the formation of hemoglobin, the main carrier of oxygen to cells of the body. It is also critical for brain and muscle health. Moreover, as previously stated, kale's omega-3 fatty acids are good for brain health.

According to one recent scientific study, omega-3 fatty acids are important for performance, brain memory, and behavioral function. Sulforaphane, like kale's other antioxidants, have anti-inflammatory properties, which may help cognitive function, especially after a brain injury.

13. THE NEW DIET FOOD

As kale is naturally low in calories, rich in phytonutrients, it is one of the few vegetables that provide more health benefits per serving than even some of the standard store-bought multivitamins on the shelf. Harvard University reports that kale has a high amount of protein, which can also make you feel full. Calorie-wise, one cup of kale contains only 33 calories.

Adding kale to your vegetable soup, or chicken broth, or even tomato paste, will help you meet your weight loss goals faster since you'll be full longer and faster.

Kale contains lots of great dietary fiber. In fact, each cup contains 2.4 g of dietary fiber, which is nearly 10% of what you need to consume in a daily 2,000 calorie diet. One bonus for weight loss: Dietary fiber reduces hunger and consequently, is a great tool for weight control. Kale is not only a filling, low-calorie food but it also contains many of the vitamins you need for your everyday diet and good health.

14. STROKE PREVENTION

Medical professionals have found that people who took 4,069 mg of potassium a day had a 49% decrease in ischemic heart disease as compared with those who had less.

Potassium is known to help prevent stroke. Twenty percent of all those who eat foods rich in amounts of potassium live longer. Kale has 349 mg of potassium in just one cup.

15. DIABETES ANTIDOTE?

When your body doesn't produce enough insulin, your glucose levels skyrocket, and bam, you've got diabetes. Glucose, which is a good thing if controlled, is found in foods. Glucose is converted into energy, and without it, your body doesn't stay healthy. Sadly, more than 25.8 million Americans have diabetes. That's about 8.3% of the entire US population. We have reached the pandemic stage.

Reader's Digest recently named kale as one of the nine healthiest foods for diabetics to eat. Their article reports that there is some growing research that supports the notion that kale can be beneficial to those suffering from diabetes.

The article connected a compound found in kale, sulforaphane, along with anti-inflammatory acid in the body, helps control blood sugar. It even helps repair cardiovascular injuries.

Diabetics, who struggle with a vulnerable system, can also benefit from eating kale because it contains, fiber, vitamins C and K, vitamin A, beta-carotene, zeaxanthin, manganese, all of which help turn protein into sugar.

16. CANCER FIGHTER

Organosulfur compounds are organic compounds that contain sulfur. Here is the reason for kale's odorous quality. Sulfur is a natural deterrent for different forms of cancer. Organosulfur is broken down into isothiocyanates, which help to break down cancer cells in the body. It is particularly useful in fighting colon cancer, considered by many to be one of the ugliest forms of cancer. Kale has been proven to help reduce the risk of lung cancers by 39% and provides a healthier immune system, which in turn, is beneficial in the fight against cancer.

17. A NATURAL ANTIOXIDANT

Like other leafy green vegetables, kale is rich in antioxidants, including vitamin C, beta-carotene, as well as various flavonoids and polyphenols. Antioxidants counteract oxidative damage by free radicals in the body.

Thought to be among the leading causes of aging and many other diseases, oxidative damage wreaks havoc in the body. Some antioxidants, however, are helpful and have other significant benefits to the body.

Some of these important antioxidants are the flavonoids quercetin and kaempferol, which are found in relatively large amounts in kale. Studied intensely by scientists, they have potent anti-inflammatory, antiviral, anticancer, antidepressant, cardioprotective, and blood pressure lowering effects.

18. POSSIBLE ROLE IN TREATING OSTEOPOROSIS

Kale is high in vitamin K. Some experts are suggesting that the vitamin k in kale may help treat osteoporosis. This may be a fundamental role in blood clotting and excessive bleeding prevention.

19. PREBIOTIC NUTRIENTS

A recent study that combines kale and lentils are finding that this food combination is particularly nutrient-rich. Two areas of nutrition are highlighted: mineral nourishment and "prebiotic nutrients." Prebiotic nutrients are those that help support the growth of good bacteria in our gut. These nutrients involve short chains of simple sugars called "oligosaccharides." (Glucooligosaccharides, fructooligosaccharides, and xylooligosaccharides are well-studied examples of oligosaccharides.)

The combination of prebiotic nutrients in kale and lentils together, were especially complementary since each of the foods provided the nutrients that the other one lacked. In each nutrient category, kale and lentils could contribute that the other could not, resulting in exceptional combined nutrient richness. Try it out for yourself!

20. PACKED FULL OF VITAMINS

In review, this beautiful vegetable, Kale is very rich in so many nutrients, containing the following:

- o Vitamin A: 206% of the RDA (from beta-carotene). Vitamin A provides many incredible health benefits. For example, it can help your liver be healthy.
- o Vitamin B6: 9% of the RDA. This vitamin is essential for healthy brain development and hormones, such as serotonin, norepinephrine, and melatonin which helps to maintain your body's natural clock.
- o Vitamin K: 684% of the RDA. This vitamin is vital in providing health benefits, such as healthy bones and helping to prevent heart disease.
- o Manganese: 26% of the RDA. Manganese helps in many ways. For example, it fights against blood clotting and even regulates sex hormones.
- o Calcium: 9% of the RDA. This vitamin helps your body stay healthy. As with several other vitamins, it helps blood to clot. Ninety-nine percent of the calcium in the body are in bones and teeth, which helps them stay active.
- o Copper: 10% of the RDA. Copper helps your immune system and bones of your entire body. It also helps the body make more blood cells.
- o Potassium: 9% of the RDA. Potassium helps with some critical functions in the body. It helps with normal body balance in your body cells and regulates body fluid. It is also an electrolyte.
- o Magnesium: 6% of the RDA. This mineral stimulates 300 enzyme reactions and also helps with thousands of biochemical reactions. It is also essential for nutrient metabolism, muscle contractions, and many other factors, such as the creation of energy.

Praised as an exceptionally nutrient-rich food, kale has enjoyed much attention in the health community for some time now. Try adding kale to your next pizza for a nutritional boost. If you juice, incorporate kale in your morning drink for a quick refreshing and energizing uplift to help you stay active all day.

Your children might enjoy eating baked kale chips rather than other harmful snacks. It's quite easy to prepare. No oil is added, just spices of your choice, a little salt, and nutritional yeast is all you need. Our family uses Old Bay or Cajun seasonings to spice it up. Bake 7-10 minutes in a 225 degree toaster oven or regular oven for dark-green crispy treat.

As you can see, the vitamins and valuable nutrients in our humble kale are very important for your body's health. Consuming kale and other healthy alternatives instead of sugars and fats-laden foods so prevalent in our diets will help maintain better overall health, as well as help keep control of our weight. As we age, we will appreciate the many benefits of eating right. Our bodies will pay it forward. Try some tonight for better health!