

Vegetables: health superstars

Vegetables are a very underrated group of foods. They are high in nutrients, antioxidants and fibre; all of which help to improve our overall health, fertility and gut health. Non-starchy vegetables (usually the colourful ones) are low in energy so will help to fill you up without causing weight gain. Starchy vegetables (e.g. potato, kumara, parsnip) are good for us too but in smaller portions.

Experimenting with different cooking methods and adding healthy flavours can make a world of difference to the appeal and taste of colourful vegetables. Don't be afraid to give something new a try! If you don't like a vegetable a certain way, try cooking it differently next time or with different flavours.

A balanced main meal =
 $\frac{1}{4}$ protein
 + $\frac{1}{4}$ carbohydrate
 + $\frac{1}{2}$ a plate of vegetables



<p>Easy and quick raw vegetables</p>	<p>I always have the following vegetables on hand; they are tasty raw or cooked and very quick to add to a meal / takeaway or to have as a snack:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrot • Cucumber • Tomato / cherry tomatoes • Spinach leaves (or kale / mesclun) • Celery • Beetroot (I like it grated raw in a salad)
<p>Replace some carbs with colourful vegetables</p>	<p>Use vegetable noodles in a spaghetti or stir-fry dish to replace half the regular pasta or noodles. Vegetable noodles are available in supermarkets (usually made from zucchini, carrot, beetroot, pumpkin) or you can make your own using a spiralizer (electric or manual).</p>

	<p>Use a peeler to peel strips of raw zucchini to add to cooked spaghetti pasta.</p> <p>Chop half a bag of spinach and stir into cooked rice. Finely chop a raw bok-choy and add into cooked rice (goes well with an Asian-style curry). Finely chop broccoli, pour over boiling water for 5-6 minutes, then drain and stir into cooked rice.</p> <p>When making roast vegetables, use a bit less of the high carbohydrate starchy vegetables (potato, kumara, parsnip, taro, and yams) and add more low carbohydrate vegetables like pumpkin, carrot and beetroot to the mix.</p> <p>For a noodle-based salad, add less noodles and add a bag of mung beans. These add a good bit of freshness and crunch and look a bit like noodles too.</p> <p>Use cauliflower rice either as a rice substitute or half-half with normal rice or quinoa. Pulse blend cauliflower in a food processor to make grains the size of rice. Tip into a heatproof bowl, cover and microwave for 7 mins on high (or until cooked) – there is no need to add any water. Fluff with a fork.</p>
<p>Easy cooked vegetable ideas</p>	<p>Chop broccoli into florets, season, spray with oil, add 1-2 minced/finely chopped cloves of garlic and roast for 25-30mins at 200 degrees. Toss with lemon juice and zest when you pull it out of the oven. This works really well for halved Brussels sprouts too. Try these instead of potato fries as a side with homemade burgers, delicious!</p> <p>Chop cauliflower into very small pieces, mix with spices (ras-al-hanout or curry powder are a good match), spray with oil and bake. Chopped red onion goes well in this mix too. It usually takes around 25-30mins at 200 degrees. Mix a bag of spinach in after it is cooked, and some roasted cashews/almonds too for more crunch.</p> <p>Miso baked pumpkin: Chop pumpkin into 2cm cubes. Put into a mixing bowl and add 1Tb white miso paste and 1Tb olive oil. When the pumpkin is lightly coated, put onto a roasting tray and bake at 200 degrees for around 30-40 minutes.</p> <p>Honey roasted carrots: Chop approximately 6-8 carrots into 1-2cm chunks or use 2 bunches of baby carrots (split lengthways if quite big). Add 1 sprig of chopped rosemary and 1Tb olive oil. Roast for</p>

	<p>around 25 minutes at 220 degrees. Remove from oven, stir 1Tb honey and 2tsp balsamic vinegar and lots of pepper through the carrots and bake again for 5 minutes.</p> <p>Fried mushrooms: Slice mushrooms thinly and use a spray oil, add lots of pepper.</p>
Soup and sauces	<p>A great way to increase your vegetable intake and use up tired vegetables from the fridge. A filling and delicious choice which is not high in energy but does contain lots of antioxidants.</p> <p>Sauces: Make a cheese sauce using margarine and reduced fat milk. Cook around ¼ cauliflower separately (steam until soft) and blend, before adding to your cheese sauce. A homemade tomato sauce is an excellent opportunity to add lots of vegetables (e.g. carrot, zucchini, capsicum, spinach).</p> <p>Broccoli stalk pesto is a great flavoursome sauce and a good way to use up the stalk of the broccoli.</p>
Pizza	<p>Choose a thin base (wholemeal is higher in fibre, wraps can make a good thin base) or a cauliflower pizza base (can buy ready-made at the supermarket or make your own).</p> <p>Use a tomato-based sauce / homemade tomato sauce to spread over the base.</p> <p>Add a wide range of vegetable toppings – whatever you like.</p>
Fritters / burger patties	<p>Grated carrot, beetroot, zucchini, chopped spinach are all easy additions to fritters or burger patties.</p>
<p>Indulgent vegetable dishes</p> <p>These are not as health conscious as my other suggestions, but they're great as an occasional treat.</p>	<p>Crumbed cauliflower bites (dip cauliflower florets into whisked egg, then into a mix of panko crumbs with a pinch of curry powder). Spray with oil. Bake at 200 until golden.</p> <p>Cheesy broccoli bites (chop broccoli very small, mix with ½ onion (chopped) and 1/2C grated cheese. Mold into 2T rough patties and bake on a tray in the oven at 200 until golden.</p> <p>Creamy leeks (use light sour cream or light evaporated milk). Creamy mushrooms (use light sour cream).</p>

Adding flavour

Herbs	Fresh or dried herbs are an excellent addition and can really enhance your vegetable dish. Some common herbs are oregano, parsley, tarragon, sage, dill, chives, and coriander.
Spices	Having a small range of spices in the cupboard comes in very useful for adding punch and flavour to vegetable dishes. Cumin, coriander, chilli, pepper, nutmeg, turmeric, garam masala, curry powder, Sichuan pepper etc.
Citrus juice	Use freshly squeezed lemon or lime juice to add zing to your vegetable dishes/salads. Orange juice can also work well for some dishes (e.g. roast carrots).
Vinegars	Balsamic vinegar, white vinegar, white wine/red wine vinegar, apple cider vinegar etc all add a bit of acidity to your vegetable dishes. A little vinegar can make a salad so much more delicious.
Vegetables	Use other vegetables for flavour, such as garlic, fresh chilli and/or onion.
Mustards	Dijon, wholegrain, American, hot English... There are many different mustards, and they are great to use in homemade dressings / dishes / salads.
Honey / maple syrup	While these are high in sugar, a little goes a long way for flavour in a vegetable dish. Using a small amount (1-2tsp) occasionally in a whole dish is fine, such as honey- roasted carrots or maple-roasted pumpkin.
Miso paste / soy sauce	These are high in salt so not the healthiest choice but a little occasionally is OK. I love miso-baked pumpkin which uses around 1Tb of white miso paste for a whole tray of cubed pumpkin. Soy sauce is also very high in sodium, but a small amount added to stir-fried vegetables can really add flavour (e.g. 1-2tsp for total dish).