



Spinach as Superfood

- ~~It is a highly nutritious vegetable that originated in Persia (modern day Iran).~~

Spinach is the native plant of Persia. It was introduced in China in the 7th Century. It was probably introduced into Europe in the 12th Century and into the US in 1800's.

Popeye was not the only believer in the plentiful benefits of **spinach**. Nutritionists and dieticians, and increasingly the medical profession as a whole have come to understand that **spinach** truly is one of the healthiest foods you can eat. **Spinach recipes** are a vital part of your ongoing health and vitality.

Spinach is low in calories, yet extremely high in vitamins, minerals and other phytonutrients (natural plant chemicals with human nutritional value).

Unlike a handful of other nutrient-dense health foods (such as aloe vera and spirulina), **spinach** is readily accessible to all, available almost everywhere in the world today as a whole food, rather than only as a processed supplement, and is a low priced vegetable that everyone can afford. It can be used in a remarkably wide range of **healthy spinach recipes**.

Our diets have changed dramatically over the past century and with those changes have come a raft of degenerative diseases. Some of these diseases were never before known. Others are now occurring far more commonly and at younger ages than in generations past.

It is no co-incidence that our changed diet and the rise of these diseases go hand-in-hand.

One of those changes has been that grain products have become one of the dominant sources of caloric intake today, despite being relatively low in nutrient value.

On the other hand, our diet today contains only 40% of the volume of vegetables, such as **spinach**, than it did a century ago.

Spinach is versatile and can be eaten cooked as a vegetable, raw in salads (a superior alternative to low nutrient iceberg lettuce) and in many other recipe forms.

Being rich in the mineral **potassium** and **low in sodium**, spinach is excellent for maintaining your heart in maximum gear.

Potassium or potassium-rich diets are an effective first line of defence against **high blood pressure / hypertension**. Potassium salts are commonly recommended as a substitute for sodium chloride (common table/cooking salt) for people at risk of or suffering from high blood pressure. Potassium lowers blood pressure. Sodium raises blood pressure. Spinach, being high in potassium and low in sodium is therefore a clear choice for your cardiovascular health.

Folate or folic acid, abundant in spinach, is also known to reduce high blood pressure or hypertension. Folate also reduces the risk of developing high blood pressure in the first place. It serves as both a preventative and a treatment for hypertension. Folate may also help blood vessels relax, improving blood flow.

Co-enzyme Q10, of which spinach is one of only two plant sources (the other is broccoli) plays an important role in cardiovascular and heart health. **Co-Q10** is essential for **muscle strength** throughout the human body - and the **heart** is one of the body's muscles. In fact, patients on statin (cholesterol lowering) medications often suffer the side effects of weak and painful muscles because statins interfere with the human liver's natural ability to produce Co-Q10. Accordingly, Co-enzyme Q-10 is often recommended by doctors to be taken as a supplement alongside statin drugs. Wouldn't it be nice if the medical profession just recommended more spinach in the diet?

Specific to **heart and cardiovascular health**, there has been over 30 years of research studies into the role of Co-enzyme Q10 for both prevention and treatment. The research solidly establishes that Co-enzyme Q10, an antioxidant, has potential for use in prevention and treatment of cardiovascular disease, particularly hypertension, **hyperlipidemia**, **coronary artery disease**, and **heart failure**.

Lutein, an antioxidant carotenoid also abundant in spinach, prevents or reduces **atherosclerosis**, or **hardening of the arteries**. Atherosclerosis is one of the major causes of **heart attacks**, so lutein is a valuable nutrient for the prevention of not just atherosclerosis, but also of heart attacks and strokes.

Animal studies, believed to be likely to produce similar results in humans, show that spinach proteins (particularly in the presence of a low vegetable oil diet) **lowers cholesterol and triglyceride levels**. The consequences for heart and cardiovascular health of lower cholesterol and triglyceride levels is obvious to all.

Even in the event of a heart attack, researchers now believe that spinach and other leafy green vegetables will minimise the tissue damage caused to the heart. The chemical **nitrate**, found in spinach and other leafy green vegetables, is credited with this protective effect.

Overall, spinach is a delicious and nutritious, multi-faceted defence against heart and cardiovascular diseases.

Given the vast array of vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients found in spinach, it shouldn't surprise that modern research proves spinach to be a powerful anti cancer agent. In addition to cancer prevention for many forms of cancer, some evidence suggests also that it may be partially curative of some forms of cancer, too.

The author of "**Feed Your Genes Right**", Jack Challem, states that the Folic Acid, a B group Vitamin, found in abundance in Spinach works to make and to repair genes.

Make **spinach recipes** a daily part of your life, starting today. Your body will thank you for it. You can get really creative with Spinach as you can cook with it or make salads with the baby spinach leaves.

A Medical Research published in 2004 by The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center shows that spinach is protective against **bladder cancer**. High dietary intake of the alpha-tocopherol form of Vitamin E found in spinach was associated with a 42 percent reduced risk of bladder cancer in their five year study. Another form of Vitamin E also abundant in spinach, gamma-tocopherol, serves to reduce the risk of **prostate cancer**.

A 2001 study shows that chlorophyllin, a derivative of chlorophyll that is abundant in spinach, greatly reduces the risk of aflatoxin related **liver cancer**. Aflatoxin is a fungus commonly found in grains, soybeans and peanuts and is a known carcinogen that damages human DNA. Ongoing research is seeking to ascertain



whether chlorophyllin may also be protective against **colon cancer** and smoking-related **lung cancer**.

Chlorophyllin aside, spinach is already protective against **colon cancer** due to its high antioxidant carotenoid levels.

Spinach has also been proven to reduce the risk of **stomach cancer**.

Other studies attribute lutein and zeaxanthin found in spinach to the reduced risk of **ovarian cancer**. (Cancer Causes and Control, 2001)

In regards to human cancer generally, a 2005 Japanese study looked at the fruits and vegetables most commonly claimed to have cancer protection benefits. It studied human cancer cells under laboratory conditions and concluded that spinach was the most cancer protective of all. In addition to a preventative role, spinach had the strongest inhibitory effect on human cancer cell development.

Spinach is best eaten fresh. It loses its nutritional value with each passing day. To maintain its freshness you can buy fresh spinach and freeze immediately after buying. This will trap its nutrients until you are ready to use it. You however will not be able to use the leaves for salads as they will have wilted. Great for cooking though! For salads always buy fresh spinach and consume within 24 hours!

Should you have it raw or cooked. Actually both as they both have their advantages. Whilst cooking may lose some of the Vitamin C and folate content, cooking Spinach increases the bioavailability of Beta carotenin and lutein.

So the general rule is uncooked baby spinach in salads and sandwiches and cooked spinach for dinner time at least 2 or 3 times a week!

After all this we would have to be insane not to include Spinach in our diets at least 3-4 times a week.

Here are some fun recipes that you can get started with and then get experimental after that and create your own!

Rocket and Chargrilled Chicken Salad

Ingredients

200 grams of Rocket leaves
500 gms of boneless chicken cut into strips
4 Garlic cloves crushed
100 gms Cashew nuts
10 gms of pine nuts
Soya sauce
Freshly ground black pepper
Light Thousand Island dressing/Olive oil and lemon dressing with cracked mustard

Method

Marinate the chicken strips in Soya sauce and garlic for an hour.

Oil an iron based frying pan, place the chicken strips and cook on high fire. Add pepper and cook further until fully blackened.

In the meantime prepare a big platter by making a bed of rocket leaves. When done place the chicken strips on the bed of rocket leaves, sprinkle on a handful of cashew nuts and pine nuts. If you fancy you could crumble some feta cheese on top of the salad or grated parmesan.

You can enjoy a lot of variations on this basic salad which you could serve on a bed of rice or with pasta or even Quinoa.

