

# The Wellness Family

Dr. Gerken Keeps You Informed

## Eating Green

We all want to raise healthy children, and one of the most important things we can do is feed them right; but cutting back on sugar, dairy and fast foods is only the first step. A vital part of feeding our family right is introducing healthier foods.

### **Too Much Fruit**

We've been told for over a decade that five servings of fruits and vegetables a day are part of a healthy and well-balanced diet; but is this actually accurate? Most fruit is high in fructose, a natural sugar.

While fructose is not as bad as processed sugar, the body reacts to all sugars the same. Whether it is fructose, glucose, galactose, sucrose, lactose or maltose, the body will still recognize it as sugar, process it for energy and send it into the blood stream. An excess of any of these numerous types of sugar results in higher blood sugar content and can eventually cause problems.

While fruit is high in several essential vitamins, it's vital to control the quantity of fruit being eaten to help regulate the amount of sugar being consumed.

### **More Vegetables**

A recent study by the American Journal of Nutrition stated that many families are eating their "five a day" but that dark green vegetables only accounted for 6% of the fruits and vegetables consumed.

The reality is that a healthier and more well-balanced diet will actually be one serving of fruit to every four servings of vegetables daily, with the greener vegetables being the higher priority.

Vegetables are full of not just vitamins but also essential minerals necessary for good health; and they are lower in calories with less sugar than fruit. Specifically, dark green leafy vegetables, calorie for calorie, are the most concentrated source of nutrition for your family. They are rich in minerals, such as: iron, calcium, potassium and magnesium.

They are also high in Vitamin K, C, E plus many of the B vitamins and they provide a variety of phytonutrients including beta-carotene, lutein and zeaxanthin.

### **What are Phytonutrients?**

Phytonutrients, also called phytochemicals, are the chemicals in plants that are beneficial to the body; the higher and richer the color of the vegetables, the greater the phytonutrient content.

Phytonutrients are important to your family's health because of the following benefits:

- Antioxidants
- Anti-inflammatory
- Antiviral
- Antibacterial
- Boost the immune system
- They even promote cellular repair



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### **How to Eat Green**

Green vegetables are abundant in variety, but, while some of them are packed with nutrients, vitamins and minerals, others may be sorely lacking. It's important to bring into your family's diet the vegetables that will benefit them the most.

When choosing vegetables to introduce, it's important to learn how to recognize those that are high in vitamin and mineral content. The first rule of thumb is that the darker the color, the more nutritious the vegetable.

### **Salad Greens**

Eating a salad for lunch has always been considered a "healthy choice", but that would depend upon the kind of lettuce used to make that salad. A salad of Romaine

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lettuce, endive or mustard greens is going to be a healthy salad; a salad with iceberg lettuce will be less so, since romaine lettuce has eight times the vitamin A and six times the vitamin C of iceberg lettuce.

Romaine lettuce is a great choice for a salad green since it is high in Vitamin K, A, C, folate, manganese, chromium and potassium.

### **Cooked Greens**

When thinking about vegetables to prepare with dinner, the first that come to mind are carrots, green beans, peas and corn; these are not your best choices. Lacking in many of the essential vitamins and minerals that are found in darker green vegetables, there are much better choices for your family.

Leafy dark green vegetables that should be a common staple in your family's diet are the following:

- Spinach
- Broccoli
- Turnip Greens
- Collard Greens
- Mustard Greens
- Beet Greens
- Cabbage
- Kale
- Brussel Sprouts
- Asparagus
- Bok Choy

These can be boiled, sautéed in olive oil or served in a soup; but, however you serve them, it's important that most of these vegetables become a common part of your family's daily diet.

### **Introducing These Foods**

If you should decide today to completely eliminate your standard veggie choices and introduce nothing but dark leafy green vegetables, your family is probably going to revolt. The best way to make healthy changes is gradually.

Begin by going to your local natural or whole foods store and see what dark leafy green vegetables are available in your community. Pick two of the items from the list that your family doesn't usually eat and prepare them with dinner a few nights this week. If your family is one that consumes little or no leafy green vegetables in a day then you're already on the path to healthier eating.

Continue to introduce darker green vegetables into your family's diet on a weekly basis, saving carrots, corn on the cob and the other less nutritious vegetables as a rare treat. Then set a goal that, within 60, days you and your family will be eating at least a cup (two servings) of dark green vegetables every day.

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### **For healthy recipes visit:**

[www.wholefoodsmarket.com/recipes/kitchentips/veggieflash.html](http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/recipes/kitchentips/veggieflash.html)

[www.youngwomenshealth.org/leafy.html](http://www.youngwomenshealth.org/leafy.html)

[www.mothering.com/sections/recipes/recipes.html](http://www.mothering.com/sections/recipes/recipes.html)

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### **References:**

,Journal of Nutrition. 2000;130:3063-3067

[www.associatedcontent.com/article/562951](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/562951)

[www.vegsoc.org/info/vitmineral.html](http://www.vegsoc.org/info/vitmineral.html)

[www.icpa4kids.org](http://www.icpa4kids.org)

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*Dear Parent,*

*Dr. Gerken is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. Take a moment today to discuss your dietary concerns with your Family Wellness Chiropractor.*

This newsletter is provided to you by:

**The Chiropractic Office of  
and Dr. Donald Gerken  
at 88 E Bonita Road; Suite E  
Chula Vista, CA 91910  
619.422.3088**