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DOUBLE YOUR NUTRITION

# Power Cooking!

BY RACHEL MELTZER

9 ways to chop, sauté,  
and stir your way to  
better health

**S**tocked up on leafy greens? Super. Did you know that sautéing them in a bit of olive oil instead of steaming them will help you absorb up to five times as much of the vision-protecting antioxidant beta-carotene? Buying healthy food is just the first step toward a better diet; preparing it correctly can make or break your

nutrient bank. Keep reading for even more surprising nutrition-enhancing prep tips.

## 1. Fire Up Heart Protection

Heating lycopene-rich tomatoes instigates a chemical change that makes the heart-healthy nutrient much easier for your body to

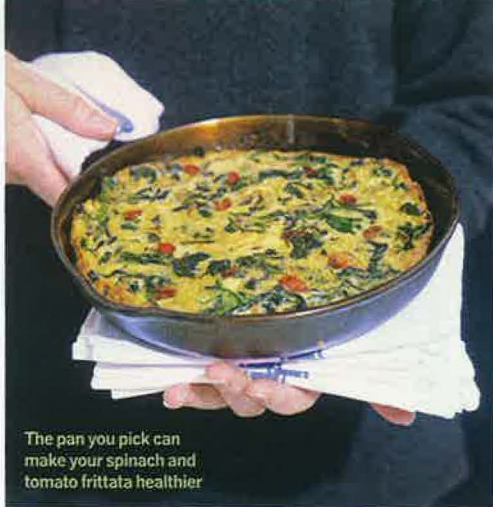
absorb. Try halving Roma tomatoes lengthwise; arrange on a baking sheet, drizzle with olive oil, and season with salt and pepper. Broil for 15 to 20 minutes, until slightly shriveled. Adding canned crushed tomatoes or tomato paste to recipes works, too. (They were heated during processing.)

## 2. Maximize Cancer Prevention

High temperatures destroy allinase, garlic's most important cancer-fighting

**“Add strawberries to your cereal and beans to marinara sauce to oomph up the iron”**

and immunity-boosting enzyme. After chopping, **let crushed garlic stand for about 10 to 15 minutes** before adding it to a sizzling pan. This allows the pungent herb to generate compounds that blunt the damaging effects of heat, report scientists at Pennsylvania State Univer-



The pan you pick can make your spinach and tomato frittata healthier

sity and the National Cancer Institute. No time to spare? You can always enjoy raw garlic. We love rubbing it on toasted bread and topping it with chopped tomato and onion and a dash of olive oil for a simple bruschetta.

## 3. Get 10 Times the Iron

Cooking with tomatoes, apples, or lemons? **Heat acidic foods like these in a cast-iron pot or skillet** to spike the amount of the energy-boosting iron you absorb by more

than 2,000%, suggests a Texas Tech University study. “Some iron from the skillet leaches into the food, but the particles are small

enough that you won't be able to see or taste them—and it's perfectly safe,” says Cynthia Sass, RD, MPH, spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association.

**Bonus tip:** You don't have to pull out a pan; **coupling certain iron-rich foods with**



**high-acid ones gives a tenfold boost to your iron absorption.** "While the iron in red meat is easily absorbed on its own, the type of iron found in beans, grains, and veggies isn't," Sass says. When making a spinach salad, toss in mango slices to increase the iron payoff. Other healthy combos: beans and tomato sauce or cereal and strawberries.

## 4. Strengthen Eyes and Bones

Adding avocado, olive oil, nuts, olives, or another healthy fat source to red, green, orange, and yellow fruits and veggies **increases the amount of fat-soluble vitamins, such as A, E, and K.** These nutrients boost vision, improve immunity, and protect against stroke and osteoporosis, respectively. "Fat acts as a transporter for them," explains Sass. The same strategy works for carotenoids, the compounds

**“Sprinkling herbs like marjoram into your garden salad dramatically increases the antioxidant content”**

that give tomatoes and carrots their bright hues. Proof: A recent study from the Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center found that men and women who ate salsa containing chunks of avocado

absorbed 4.4 times as much lycopene and 2.6 times as much beta-carotene than those who enjoyed plain salsa.

## 5. Stock Up on Calcium

If you're preparing homemade chicken soup, it's smart to add a hint of lemon juice, vinegar, or tomato to the mix.

**Pairing a slightly acidic broth with on-the-bone chicken can up the soup's calcium content by 64%,** according to researchers at Harvard University and Beth Israel Hospital in Boston. (This stock dissolves the bone's calcium more easily than a nonacidic one would.)

**Bonus tip:** Other research that was referenced in the Harvard/Beth Israel study has shown that slathering spare-ribs with an acidic vinegar-based barbecue sauce will dramatically increase the calcium content.

## 6. Grill without Worry

The high heat needed to grill meats can create carcinogenic compounds called heterocyclic amines (HCAs),

but marinating can help. When researchers at Lawrence Livermore National Labora-

tory in Livermore, CA, soaked chicken breasts in a mixture of brown sugar, olive oil, cider vinegar, garlic, mustard, lemon juice, and salt for 4 hours, they **developed up to 99% fewer HCAs after 20 minutes of grilling** than unmarinated



chicken did. Try the marinade, previous page, or add an extra antioxidant kick with this herb-packed soak:  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of balsamic vinegar; 2 tablespoons of fresh rosemary; 1 tablespoon each of olive oil, honey, and minced garlic; and  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon of black pepper.

**Bonus tip:** Instead of marinating hamburgers (too messy), mix in some rosemary. Research has found that it can slash the production of some HCAs by as much as 72%.

## 7. Fight Colds and Flu

When you're slicing and dicing fresh produce, cut large pieces. Lots of small portions expose more of the fruit or vegetable to nutrient-leaching oxygen and light. **"A larger cut allows you to hold on to more vitamin C,** which helps bolster immunity," says Roberta Larson Duyff, RD, author of the *American Dietetic Association Complete Food and Nutrition Guide*. Quarter carrots, potatoes, and tomatoes instead of dicing them; slice melons into crescents rather than cubing.

## 8. Retain Key Nutrients

Save yourself some time—and some key nutrients—by *not* peeling eggplant, apples, potatoes, and other produce before using. "The peel itself is a natural barrier against nutrient loss, and **many vitamins and minerals are found in the outer skin or just below it,**" Duyff says. Yam skin is loaded with fiber, and zucchini's is full of lutein, which may help prevent age-related macular degeneration, for example. (Remove grit and pathogens with cold, running water and a vegetable brush.)

**Bonus tip:** Add citrus zest to your favorite recipes. A University of Arizona study linked eating limonene—a compound in lemon, lime, and orange peel—to a 34% reduction in skin cancer.

## 9. Double the Antioxidants

Dressing your salad with herbs can more than double its cancer-fighting punch, according to a recent Italian study. When compared with garden salads made with no added herbs, those featuring lemon balm and marjoram had up to 200% more antioxidants per serving. **Spices such as ginger and cumin also upped the antioxidant quotient.**

Research Editor Rachel Meltzer is studying to become a registered dietitian.