

1+1= Better Nutrition

Two good foods are better than one, especially when they're combined. Learn how to boost your health by combining two powerhouse foods into one nutritional knockout.



We all have our favorite food combinations—macaroni and cheese, peanut butter and jelly, milk and cookies.

We eat them because we love the way they taste together. But what if you could combine certain foods in such a way that they'd taste great, but they'd also be healthier? And I don't mean just your run-of-the-mill healthy—I mean super-healthy.

We've all heard of the benefits vitamins and minerals in foods provide. These include promoting strong bones and healthy skin, improving vision, and helping blood clot. But not quite as famous are phytochemicals—compounds found naturally in plants that, while not required by the body, are extremely helpful in improving health and decreasing the risk of some diseases beyond that accomplished by vitamins and minerals.

You may be familiar with the effects of some phytochemicals without even knowing it. Have you heard that cranberry juice can help decrease the likelihood of developing urinary tract infections? A group of phytochemicals called *proanthocyanidins* found in cranberries, as well as blueberries, has been shown to help prevent bacteria from sticking to the urinary tract walls, lowering the risk infection.

Scientists have been studying phytochem-

icals for several years and learned how powerful they are. Now, they've discovered that the benefits of some compounds are magnified when foods containing them are combined or prepared in certain ways.

For example, tomatoes contain a phytochemical called *lycopene* that may decrease the risk of prostate cancer. In addition, consuming lycopene regularly, in the form of cooked tomato products such as tomato sauce and ketchup, may also help prevent prostate cancer from spreading and help keep tumors smaller. Lycopene may also lower the risk of breast, lung, and stomach cancers.

Another vegetable, broccoli, contains substances called *glucosinolates*, compounds also known as cancer fighters. Studies have shown that eating a combination of tomatoes and broccoli resulted in smaller tumors than did eating either alone. The combination was even more powerful than a medication frequently used in the treatment of prostate cancer.

Nutrition experts have long stressed the importance of eating a variety of whole foods as opposed to simply relying on pills and powders to achieve optimal nutrition. This new research simply adds more credence to that recommendation.

And it doesn't stop with tomatoes and broccoli. Research has shown that fat-soluble

antioxidants such as beta-carotene in carrots are absorbed better when they're combined with a small amount of healthy fat such as olive oil or avocados. In addition, those same antioxidants, as well as vitamin C, are absorbed more from steamed than raw vegetables.

It's long been known that there's a nutritionally synergistic relationship between vitamin C and iron. Eating iron-rich foods along with vitamin C-filled foods enhances the absorption of iron—a key component in hemoglobin, which carries oxygen throughout the body.

On a slightly bigger scale, several years ago the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet was developed after researchers discovered that consuming a diet high in fruits and vegetables lowered blood pressure. Blood pressure decreases even more when the vegetables and fruits are part of a low-fat, low-sodium diet including low-fat dairy products. These four components in combination results in the greatest decrease in blood pressure, greater than any of the diet changes alone.

As you can see there are a variety of combinations that you can rely on to help maximize your health. ♣

—HRM

No. 1	+	No. 2	=	How to do it
Tomato sauce		Broccoli	A powerful cancer protection/fighter	Lunch: broccoli-topped pizza
Steak		Red peppers	Maximized iron absorption—helps prevent or improve anemia	Dinner: grilled steak with sautéed red peppers
Iron-fortified cereal		Strawberries	Maximized iron absorption—helps prevent or improve anemia	Breakfast: bowl of Cheerios with sliced strawberries
Broccoli		Steaming	Greater availability of phytochemicals—enhances immune system	Side dish or snack: steamed broccoli florets over herb-infused chicken/veggie stock
Spinach		Olive oil	More antioxidant strength to promote as protection against heart disease	Dinner: spinach sautéed in olive oil
Carrots		Avocado	More antioxidant strength for improved eye health	Lunch: salad topped with sliced avocado and shredded carrots
Low-fat yogurt		Fruit	Helps to control blood pressure	Snack: berries mixed with low-fat vanilla yogurt