

Gaining Immunity

Some veggies can rejuvenate your aging immune system.

IF YOU URGED YOUR KIDS TO EAT THEIR BROCCOLI, IT'S TIME TO TAKE YOUR OWN ADVICE. Broccoli and other cruciferous vegetables – such as cabbage, cauliflower, turnips, arugula and brussels sprouts – are known to protect against several types of cancer. Now, researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles, think that these vegetables also may prop up the body's immune system, which tends to decline as we age.

In a lab study, aged mice that received sulforaphane (a chemical found in broccoli) had improved immune function – in fact, their immune systems functioned as well as those in younger mice.

The chemical in broccoli works by stimulating the production of antioxidants that the immune system uses to fight off free radicals – molecules that damage tissues and DNA, and that are thought to contribute to aging. As people (and mice) get older, their bodies lose some of the power of this antioxidant defense system. But the chemical in broccoli makes it strong again.

Researchers believe that eating cruciferous vegetables should have the same effect in people – meaning you should eat more broccoli as you get older, not less.

– K.S.



Where's the Fiber?

You may know you need to add more fiber to your diet, but do you know where to get it? Sixty-two percent of the people responding to a recent survey by the National Fiber Council said meat was a source of fiber. They're out of luck: There's no fiber in meat – only in plants (fruits, vegetables and grains).

– K.S.

Tilapia: An Overdose of Omega-6

EATING FISH IS GENERALLY HEALTHY, but farm-raised tilapia is one type you may want to avoid. Researchers at the Wake Forest Center for Botanical Lipids in Winston-Salem, N.C., found it has extremely low levels of inflammation-fighting omega-3 fatty acids and high levels of omega-6 fatty acids. That's bad news.

Tilapia is an economical fish to farm because it thrives on inexpensive corn-based feed, which is high in omega-6. In the body, omega-6 converts to a substance that increases inflammation, says the lead researcher Floyd H. Chilton, PhD, a professor of physiology and pharmacology.

The study compared the ratios of omega-6 to omega-3

fatty acids in a variety of fish. Tilapia averaged 11:1, while farm-raised salmon and trout ratios averaged 1:1 – with as much as eight times the quantity of beneficial omega-3s.

Although we need both types of omega fatty acids, we should avoid over-consumption of omega-6-rich safflower, corn, cottonseed and peanut oils. The optimal ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 ranges from 1:1 to 4:1. Some studies have suggested that maintaining this ratio in our overall diets, rather than consuming quantities of omega-3, plays a key role in preventing inflammatory conditions like rheumatoid arthritis (RA), asthma and heart disease.

– ELLEN FIX