

Leyla Weighs In: A time to nourish



This is a good time—now that you have lots of it—to practice some long overdue self-care and self-nurture. That starts with good food.

You want good, clean food packed with antioxidants and phytochemicals to keep your immune system humming along. This means choosing colors. The variety of color in your vegetables and fruit determines how many different beneficial phytochemicals you consume.

A tenet of Integrative and Functional Nutrition is to include a minimum of five different colors a day of vegetables and fruits with your meals. To make this easier, focus on your salad: Start with the dark green of leafy vegetables and the oranges and reds in peppers, beets, tomatoes, radishes, squashes and the like, all of which add beneficial carotenoids like beta-carotene, lycopene as well as vitamin C—to name a few micronutrients. Blues, purples and reds like blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, grapes, and melon(s) add flavonoids and anthocyanidins critical for health.

Besides carotenoids and flavonoids, there's loads of folate in greens like chard, kale, mustard greens, dandelion greens, collards, arugula, broccoli rabe, and spinach. I love to sauté or braise greens with garlic. It's a wonderful side dish for lamb, chicken or fish. If you like a little kick, sprinkle in some hot pepper flakes.

Oven roasted vegetables like cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, carrots, and zucchini deliver wonderful flavor and sweetness—a nutritious addition to any main dish. And don't forget to roast onions and garlic. Their flavors mellow and the roasted garlic can be used as a condiment with your meals, adding a delicious nutty flavor.

For when you feel like noshing on just a little something, keep a tray of crudité in the fridge. Mine typically features celery, cucumbers, carrots, radishes and scallions. Crunchy veggies feel good and are gratifying to eat. Mastication (chewing) is good for teeth and gums. And I love to dip the tip of a scallion stalk in a tiny bit of salt and just eat it raw. Hey, I'm not going anywhere.

So, the next time you go out to the grocery store, never mind the toilet paper. Head on over to the produce section and revel in the abundance of it all!

To your health!