

Phytonutrients

Ever wonder why Mom always said to eat our veggies? Why not just take a vitamin pill? Mom may not have known it but besides having an abundance of essential vitamins and minerals plus fiber, plant foods have another powerful purpose. Their secret weapon lies in what are called phytonutrients or phytochemicals. There are thousands of them. Every plant has them. They have names like Flavonoids (found in a large range of foods), Glucosinolates (found in cruciferous vegetables), Allicin (found in garlic), Resveratrol (found in purple grape juice) and Curcuminoids (found in Turmeric). They work in the plant to protect it from its environment and defend against germs, bugs, fungi and other threats. They give plant foods their color, taste and smell.

Phytonutrients are also powerful defenders of health. They have been shown to boost the immune system and brain health (including memory), fight inflammation, improve cardiovascular health and protect against cancer. They have anti-microbial and anti-bacterial benefits.

Fruits and vegetables as well as legumes (beans), whole grains, nuts, seeds, herbs, spices and teas are all good sources of phytonutrients. Basically every edible plant has its own personally packaged benefits for us.

Phytonutrients are identified by color – green, yellow-orange, red, blue-purple and white. Which is why it's important to eat foods of every color. Think about the foods you've been eating. How much variety of color is there? You may be eating mostly processed foods which are brown, yellow and white. Is your breakfast plate eggs, potatoes and toast or pancakes? Is lunch fries, pizza and sandwich or burger? Add some color with melon and kiwi at breakfast and a colorful salad at lunch or dinner.

When it comes to fruits and vegetables aim to include one serving each of red, yellow, orange, green and purple-blue and one serving each of legumes (beans) and nuts or seeds every day. If that sounds like a lot, **come see me and we'll talk about strategies that will work for you.** Also, stop by for a handout to help you get started adding more phytonutrients into your day.