

DARK GREEN LEAFY VEGETABLES

They might taste bitter or peppery, but getting a regular dose of dark green leafy vegetables is an easy way to take your food as medicine.

why they are so good for you

Eating dark green leafy vegetables such as spinach, silverbeet, kale, rocket and endive can produce these health benefits:

- ▶ Protect your eyes from age-related macular degeneration (AMD), and if your eyes are already affected, lower your risk of progressing to advanced AMD
- ▶ Protect your brain from cognitive decline by preserving your memory and thinking abilities
- ▶ Lower your blood pressure if it's elevated, or protect it from rising.

The darker the vegetables, the richer they are in the carotenoid lutein and dietary nitrate. Research suggests that lutein is important for ocular (related to the eyes) and cognitive health. Dietary nitrate has been shown to improve cardiovascular health.

how they work

Lutein is an antioxidant that concentrates in the macula of

your eye and absorbs damaging UV light. The concentrations of lutein and zeaxanthin (a related carotenoid) are 500-fold higher in the macula than in other parts of your body. Lutein is also taken up by your brain, where it decreases oxidative stress and activates protective anti-inflammatory pathways.

Nitrate from vegetables is converted to nitrite and then to nitric oxide inside the body, which makes your blood vessels relax and prevents them from stiffening with age, resulting in better blood pressure control. It also inhibits your platelets from clumping together and causing blood clots.

how much to have

Include at least ½–1 cup of cooked dark green leafy vegetables or a large raw salad of dark leaves each day. Dark leafy greens contain significantly more nutrients than other green vegetables. For example, per serving, kale contains 11 times more lutein than broccoli.

You can eat these vegetables fresh or cooked (lutein is stable with boiling), or drink them in smoothies. They are particularly important for people who have prediabetes, diabetes or eyesight and memory problems or who are at risk for heart disease or stroke.



WILTED ENDIVE LEAVES WITH LEMON AND OLIVE OIL

Horta is a Greek dish consisting of wild and bitter greens. It is used traditionally as an accompaniment to many main dishes, such as those based on fish or beans, or served as a cooked salad.

PREPARATION TIME: 15 MINUTES **COOKING TIME:** 14 MINUTES **SERVES** 7

Ingredients:

- 1 bundle (about 1 kg) endive
- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup lemon juice

Method:

1. Place about 2.5 cm of water in a large, deep saucepan, then cover with lid and bring to the boil.
2. Meanwhile, scrub the kitchen sink well and fill with clean water.
3. Cut off the base of each endive bunch 5 cm up the stem and discard. Place leaves in the sink, swirl around and then transfer into a bowl. Drain the water from the sink and refill with clean water. Repeat process twice until leaves are clean, pulling off any dark or old bits. Squeeze the leaves firmly and remove excess water.
4. Add the cleaned endive into the pot of boiling water, pushing down firmly until the pot is full but so you are still able to cover it with a lid. (You may need to cook it in two batches.) Bring back to the boil and cook for about 10 minutes until the leaves have wilted.
5. Place endive in a strainer to drain excess water. Transfer wilted endive onto a serving tray or in a bowl, making sure the leaves are not clumped together.
6. Allow to cool for 15 minutes, then drizzle with olive oil and lemon juice and serve warm. Alternatively, refrigerate and enjoy cold.

PER SERVE: 693 kJ (165 cal). Protein 2 g. Total fat 16 g. Saturated fat 3 g. Carbohydrate 1 g. Cholesterol 0 mg. Calcium 67 mg. Iron 2.5 mg. Fibre 3 g.

