

food synergy

Text by Jennifer Acosta Scott • Recipes by Fiona Kennedy

A relatively new science says the key to health may be not *what* you eat, but *how* you eat. Here's how to make it work for you.

green tea soba noodle salad with sesame-crusted tofu

Serves 6

Vinaigrette

- 1½-inch piece of ginger, peeled and coarsely chopped
- ¼ cup reduced-sodium soy sauce
- 3 Tbs. rice vinegar
- 2 Tbs. honey
- 2 Tbs. lemon juice
- ½ tsp. lemon zest
- ½ tsp. salt
- 2 Tbs. canola oil
- 1 Tbs. toasted sesame oil
- ½ tsp. chili oil

Salad

- 10 oz. firm tofu
- 12 oz. dried green tea soba noodles
- ¼ cup black and white sesame seeds
- 1 Tbs. canola oil
- 1 small hot house cucumber, cut into thin half-moons, about 1 cup
- ¼ cup grated carrot
- 4 green onions, thinly sliced
- 2 Tbs. chopped cilantro

1. *To make Vinaigrette:* Put all ingredients except canola, sesame and chili oils into food processor, and process until smooth. Slowly add oils through feed tube until well combined. Set aside.
2. *To make Salad:* Slice tofu into 1-inch cubes, and drain on paper towels. Set aside.
3. After cooking soba noodles per package directions, plunge in an ice bath, and drain. Set aside.
4. Place sesame seeds on plate, and press tofu cubes into sesame seeds until coated on all sides.
5. Set large skillet over medium heat, and add oil. Transfer tofu to skillet, and cook tofu 1–2 minutes on each side, or until white seeds turn golden. Remove, and put on paper towel-lined plate to drain.
6. Place noodles, cucumbers, carrots, green onions and cilantro into large bowl. Add vinaigrette, and toss to combine. Arrange on individual serving plates, edge with cubes of tofu, and serve.

PER SERVING: 436 CAL; 18G PROT; 18G TOTAL FAT (2G SAT. FAT); 52G CARB; 0MG CHOL; 685MG SOD; 5G FIBER; 9G SUGARS

Photographs by John Kelly • Food Styling by Carin Krasner

When you add a steaming heap of broccoli to your dinner plate, you're sure that you are eating healthfully. And it's true. You are. Because foods rich in disease-fighting phytochemicals, like broccoli, are smart additions to any diet.

But suppose you could get even more health benefits from that broccoli by eating it with certain other vegetables. This idea is in line with a relatively new science called food synergy, which says that the key to health may not be *what* you eat, but rather eating food combinations that biochemically balance each other.



When that happens, it makes already nutritious foods even more so, says David Jacobs, PhD, professor of epidemiology at the University of Minnesota, who focuses on nutritional aspects of epidemiology. For example, a study in the December 2004 issue of the *Journal of Nutrition*, found that eating broccoli and tomatoes together offers better protection against prostate cancer than eating them separately. Findings such as these emphasize the importance of getting your nutrients from a combination of whole foods.

"The body's interaction with the biochemicals in food is very complex," Jacobs says. "It depends on all the things that are there at once."

The easiest way to take advantage of food synergies is to eat a wide variety of foods, especially fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts and whole grains. But a few specific combinations can ensure that your body gets the maximum benefits from certain healthful foods.

grapes and apples: a heart-healthy combo

The next time you're whipping up a fruit salad, make sure to include these naturally sweet goodies. Apples contain the flavonoid called quercetin, and grapes contain catechin. Studies show that pairing the two compounds may improve cardiovascular health by making blood platelets less sticky so they don't clump together and clog arteries. "The combination tends to have a mild anticoagulant effect," says Barry Halliwell, PhD, nutrition professor at the National University of Singapore, who co-authored a study on quercetin and catechin.

Don't care for apples and/or grapes? Other quercetin-rich foods include raspberries, buckwheat and onions; catechin is also found in red wines and green and black teas.

the power of a peanut butter sandwich

The grade-school lunch favorite is back—this time as a nutritional powerhouse. Pairing peanut butter with whole wheat bread enables the body to get the proper sequence of amino acids, which are important in making protein. "When your body is synthesizing proteins, it needs all the amino acids there at the same time," says Diane Birt, PhD, a professor of food science at Iowa State University. "Wheat lacks some amino acids. Peanuts have the amino acids lacking in wheat. Together they make a whole."

Over the long term, protein deficiencies can result in a compromised immune system and stunted growth in children. If you're trying to get in shape, insufficient protein intake can also affect your ability to build muscle. Fortunately, protein problems aren't that common in developed countries where a wide variety of foods is available, Birt says. So think of that peanut butter sandwich as a protein boost rather than a dietary staple.

add some fat to your salad

It may sound counterintuitive to healthful eating, but dropping your fat-free dressing in favor of a low-fat version may actually be a smart idea, nutritionally speaking. An Iowa State University study that was reported in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that people who ate salads with full- or low-fat dressings were better able to absorb lutein, a carotenoid (pigment-based plant compound) important in vision health. "With fat-free dressing, they essentially saw no evidence of the carotenoid showing up in the blood," Birt says.

If you're fiercely loyal to your fat-free ranch, Birt suggests adding some fat to your salad in other ways. Moderate amounts of cheese,

orecchiette with brussels sprouts, cannellini beans and pancetta

Serves 6

12 oz. dried orecchiette
pasta or shell pasta
3 oz. pancetta, finely chopped
1 lb. Brussels sprouts, sliced
horizontally into thin rings
3 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
½ tsp. sugar
¼ tsp. red chili flakes
¼ cup water
1 cup canned cannellini
beans, rinsed and drained
extra virgin olive oil, optional
grated Parmesan cheese

1. Bring large pot of water to a boil, and cook pasta according to package directions; drain.
2. Cook pancetta in large nonstick skillet over medium heat for 10 minutes, or until crispy. Remove from pan with slotted spoon, and set aside.
3. Sauté Brussels sprouts in same skillet over medium-high heat for 2 minutes.
4. Add garlic, sugar and chili flakes, and sauté for another 2 minutes. Add water and beans, and cook 2–3 minutes, or until Brussels sprouts are just tender and water has evaporated.

5. Add pancetta, and season to taste with salt and pepper. Turn off heat.
6. Add pasta to skillet, and toss to combine. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil, if desired, and sprinkle with Parmesan to taste. Serve warm.

PER SERVING: 353 CAL; 11G PROT; 6G TOTAL FAT (2G SAT. FAT); 62G CARB; 7MG CHOL; 220MG SOD; 6G FIBER; 2G SUGARS



arugula and endive salad with apples, pomegranate and toasted walnuts

Serves 6

Vinaigrette

- 2 cups unsweetened apple juice
- 1 shallot, finely minced
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cider vinegar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra virgin olive oil

Salad

- 5 oz. arugula
- 4 Belgian endive heads, leaves separated and sliced diagonally into 1-inch strips
- 1 apple, cored and sliced into thin wedges
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pomegranate seeds
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup walnuts, toasted and finely chopped

1. *To make Vinaigrette:* Put apple juice in medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Bring to a simmer, and cook until reduced to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup, about 20–25 minutes. Pour into small bowl, and add shallot, vinegar and salt and pepper to taste.

2. Slowly whisk in olive oil. Set aside.

3. *To make Salad:* Place arugula, endive, apple and pomegranate seeds in large salad bowl. Add enough vinaigrette to coat salad leaves, and toss to combine. Sprinkle walnuts over salad, and serve immediately.

PER SERVING (1 TBS. DRESSING):
64 CAL; 0G PROT; 5G TOTAL FAT (1G SAT. FAT); 6G CARB; 0MG CHOL; 26MG SOD; 0G FIBER; 5G SUGARS

PER SERVING (SALAD): 84 CAL; 2G PROT; 5G TOTAL FAT (1G SAT. FAT); 11G CARB; 0MG CHOL; 80MG SOD; 3G FIBER; 7G SUGARS



nuts or avocado can replace the oils needed to get the maximum benefit from your salad veggies.

spice up that burger

Ground beef—and many cuts of poultry and pork—often contains heterocyclic amines (HCAs), cancer-causing compounds that form when meats are cooked at high temperatures. So should you shun your beloved burger? Hardly. A recent study at Kansas State University found that sprinkling rosemary extract on ground beef before cooking it significantly reduces the formation of HCAs was presented at the March 2005 Pittsburgh Conference on Analytical Chemistry and Applied Spectroscopy meeting in Orlando, Florida.

J. Scott Smith, PhD, food chemistry professor and lead researcher on the study, says certain types of antioxidants

in rosemary extract can block the formation of HCAs. Basil and oregano contain similar antioxidants, though they are not as plentiful, Smith says. Look for rosemary extract at health food stores.

iron: not just for carnivores anymore

If you're a regular consumer of red meats such as beef and lamb, your body's probably getting all the iron it needs. But what if you prefer bean sprouts to steaks? The key is to combine foods rich in vitamin C with plant-based iron sources, says Pat Vasconcellos, registered dietitian and spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association.

Foods such as spinach and chickpeas contain significant amounts of iron, but it's not as readily available to the body as iron from animal sources. However,

vitamin C makes it easier for your body to absorb plant-based iron. So adding C-rich orange segments to a spinach salad can increase the amount of iron your body gets. "So, if someone is a vegetarian or is anemic, combining those foods can help them get more iron than they normally would," Vasconcellos explains.

Iron and vitamin C lurk in a lot of foods, so it's not hard to come up with a great combination. Pair iron-rich chickpeas with Brussels sprouts or tomatoes—both are full of vitamin C—or drink some OJ with your bowl of iron-fortified cereal. Talk about "iron-clad" nutrition!

Once you have the combinations down pat, creating food synergy is easy and tasty. The recipes on these pages make lone broccoli seem boring. □

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