



Many people don't realise that the way they cook their meals is almost as important as the ingredients they choose.

In fact, some cooking methods can destroy many nutrients and make your food less nutritious. Take watercress or spinach for example: if you boil them, you lose a lot of vitamin C and antioxidants, but this won't happen if you eat them raw in a salad.

On the other hand, some other cooking methods, like deep frying, not only destroy a lot of vitamins and antioxidants, but they also add some harmful nutrients to your meal, such as fats and trans fats. Indeed, the way you prepare your food can really make a big difference!

Here's a list of the meal preparation methods which will help you make the most of the food you eat.

RAW FOODS

Try raw foods:

- Whole
- Sliced
- Chopped
- Grated
- Mashed

Freshly harvested and prepared

Include on a daily basis. Change for variety as supply allows.

When fruits and vegetables are eaten raw, many contain higher levels of nutrients. You should therefore make sure that you eat at least a salad (or more!) and a raw fruit every day.

Some great foods to eat raw are lettuce, watercress, cabbage, tomatoes, carrots and cucumbers and most fruits.

Of course, there are some ingredients that you should not eat raw, such as grains, starchy crops and fruits, and some vegetables (like eggplants or taro leaves), but we'll talk about these later.

STEAMED FOODS

Use a bamboo or metal steaming basket or colander.

(Place colander in pot with 2 cm water at the bottom, cover with lid and cook on very low flame).

Vegetables are ready when bright in colour and tender to eat.

Fresh and refrigerated vegetables, root crops, grains

Include daily in meals

To preserve the nutrient content of food, steam rather than boil. When vegetables are boiled many vitamins (like vitamin C and B group) and antioxidants are lost in the boiling water when it is thrown out.

Steaming is considered a less "aggressive" way of cooking and should be used whenever possible.

You can steam most vegetables, leafy greens and all the starchy crops and fruits.

However, taro leaves and grains in general shouldn't be steamed (they should be boiled instead).



OVEN ROASTED

Try:

- Root crops
- Pumpkins and marrows
- covering foods while cooking in the oven helps to retain moisture.

Use low temperatures to oven roast

Allow time to cook thoroughly.

Another good way to cook your food is to roast it in the oven, preferably at lower temperatures (maximum 180 °C) and with a very small quantity of oil (maximum 1 tsp. per person per meal).

Many nutrients don't survive at higher temperatures, so it's better to avoid these in most cases.

If you're used to eating a lot of fried food, you can also try to bake it in the oven instead. This could be a good option for samosas and starchy crops for example.

LIGHTLY STIR FRY

Use a variety of brightly colored vegetables and leafy greens.

Add a dash of flavoring with herbs, spices, garlic or onion etc.

Best with fresh and refrigerated, chopped vegetables

Serve on grains for a filling meal.

Vegetables can also be very lightly stir-fried with water or a little bit of oil (maximum 1 tsp. per person per meal) and on low temperatures.

Cooking with a low amount of oil is much easier if with a non-stick pan, so if you have the possibility of getting one, that would be a great investment for the health of your family or village.

BOILING

Use a variety of brightly colored vegetables and leafy greens.

Add a dash of flavoring with herbs, spices, garlic or onion etc.

Hard vegetables, grains, legumes, taro leaves etc.

Include these foods daily. They are filling and nutritious.

Boiling is the preferred cooking method for most grains and taro leaves.

Vegetable soups should also be boiled, but make sure you don't throw away the cooking water. Instead, the water should evaporate while cooking (so don't put too much in the beginning, as you can always add more later...).

Finally...

Remind yourself to try out new foods on a regular basis.

Variety is the spice of life!