

Mushrooms: Eat your fungi!



Botanically speaking, mushrooms are not a vegetable, but a type of fungi. However, this doesn't make them any less nutritious. In fact, mushrooms have some important nutrients and health benefits.

Mushrooms love the sun

Vitamin D has been a hot topic lately in nutrition news. Some research suggests the nutrient may help prevent some types of cancer. It also plays a role in a healthy immune system and building strong bones.

Mushrooms contain a nutrient that turns into vitamin D



when exposed to sunlight. Some stores sell mushrooms processed this way. Look for "high vitamin D" mushrooms. Or, you can make them yourself by setting your fresh mushrooms in the sun for a few minutes.

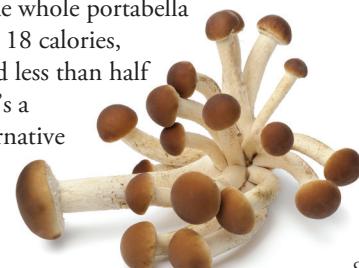
Versatile & healthy

Mushrooms have many other health benefits as well. They add flavor and interest to many recipes without adding many calories. They are very low in fat and sodium, and have fiber and a small amount of protein.



Mushrooms have some B vitamins, and contain the minerals selenium and potassium. Try adding them to pasta, pizza and meat dishes. They can also be eaten as a side dish alone: wash, slice and sauté them in a pan with a splash of olive oil and garlic until they are cooked through.

Portabella mushrooms are large enough to be eaten on a bun as a "portabella burger." In fact, one whole portabella mushroom has just 18 calories, 1 gram of fiber, and less than half a gram of fat. That's a healthy burger alternative that's worth a try!



MUSHROOM SAFETY

Mushrooms grow almost anywhere that gets enough shade and moisture. But, this doesn't mean people should pick wild mushrooms and eat them. In fact, many people have gotten sick or worse from eating wild mushrooms.

Many poisonous mushrooms look very similar to those safe to eat. Some types can cause vomiting, diarrhea and kidney damage. They can even cause death in rare cases.

To avoid poisonous mushrooms, only eat those purchased from a reputable supermarket or have been inspected and identified as safe by a mushroom expert.

Some people are allergic to mushrooms and cannot safely eat them. If you have severe allergies and have never eaten mushrooms before, ask your allergist before trying them.

Sources: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Produce for Better Health Foundation