

MIGHTY MICROGREENS

Microgreens, the seedlings of mature edible plants, pack a powerful punch, with some types providing up to 40 times the nutrient power of their mature counterparts. New research suggests that microgreens could play a significant role in fighting heart disease and high cholesterol. Researchers at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) randomly assigned 60 obese lab mice to one of six diets ranging in fat content and supplemented them with either red cabbage microgreens and mature red cabbage. (Two control groups were given no cabbage.) Despite consuming a high-fat diet, the microgreen-eating mice had reduced circulating levels of “bad” LDL cholesterol. A bonus benefit was a reduction in triglyceride levels, the type of fat that increases heart disease risk. While the results are promising, further studies on humans are the next step. Compared to mature microgreens, the mini version is richer in vitamin C, vitamin E and vitamin K. For a burst of nutrients, add red cabbage microgreens to your salads, sandwiches and omelettes along with other colorful veggies.



SOME LIKE IT *hot*

If you're a fan of spicy foods, then add liberally: A new study has found that eating red hot chile peppers is associated with a 13% reduction in all-cause mortality, specifically death caused by heart attack or stroke. Published in the scientific journal *PLoS ONE*, the study was conducted by medical student Mustafa Chopan and Benjamin Littenberg, MD, at Larner College of Medicine at the University of Vermont. Their findings corroborate a 2015 study out of China that suggested a link between consuming chile peppers and reduced mortality rates. While the results are exciting, Dr. Littenberg stresses there are limitations. “These data show an association, but we don’t know for sure that eating peppers extends life,” he says. “We don’t even know if it matters how much you eat, what kind or how hot they have to be.” Capsaicin, the main component in chile peppers, is believed to help prevent obesity and regulate blood flow to the heart. It is also thought to have antimicrobial properties that are beneficial to the gut. The research may lead to further studies or changes in dietary recommendations. The best advice for living a long, healthy life remains the same: “Eat fewer calories, avoid excess alcohol, exercise regularly, quit smoking and get a flu shot,” says Dr. Littenberg.

ASK OUR DIETITIANS

Got a food question?

We have the answers.



Q/ What are the benefits of activated charcoal?

A/ Growing in popularity as a health supplement, food-grade activated charcoal works as a cleansing agent to help flush toxins from the body. It also works well as a digestive aid, as a teeth whitener and as a support for healthier skin. Activated charcoal is processed using very high heat to make it more porous, which allows it to bind impurities and unwanted substances into millions of tiny pores. It has long been used to treat drug and alcohol overdoses and some types of food and chemical poisonings. Once ingested, activated charcoal binds with substances in the digestive tract, essentially trapping the toxin before it is absorbed by the body. However, the binding effect it has in the stomach can interfere with the absorption and efficacy of medications and absorption of nutrients from meals. (To prevent this, take at least 1 hour after taking an oral medication. To prevent nutrient binding, take between meals and only when needed.) Research into its broader health properties is still preliminary, but when administered correctly, activated charcoal is effective when used as a cleansing supplement or for digestive relief. Speak with your health-care professional about whether it's right for you. 

