

Juicing

Juicing can be one of the most beneficial things you can do for your health, if you do it right. Juicing supports your overall vitality, and the health of your digestion, metabolism, skin, liver, and joints. As everyone knows by now, we should be eating more vegetables, especially the non-starchy ones. The average American eats only 1.5 servings of vegetables a day, while ideally, we should be getting 5-10. Juicing is an easy and nutrient-dense way to do it. Below are some of the benefits of juicing, some thoughts about juicers, answers to the most common questions people have about juicing, and some suggestions to get started.

Juicing Benefits

Phytonutrients If you follow nutritional news, you might be aware of the excitement about phytonutrients. Phytonutrients are compounds from plants, that have health benefits, for example: antioxidants, anti-inflammatories, and immune boosters. Researchers believe they can be key to preventing, resisting, and sometimes repairing many diseases and degenerative processes.

Nutrient Density Because it is liquid, and the fiber is removed, the nutrients in fresh juice are more easily and efficiently digested, absorbed and assimilated than those in the whole vegetables. In this way, juicing is almost comparable to using herbal extracts. This makes fresh veggie juice a powerful, highly concentrated aid for cleansing, repair and restoration on the cellular level.

Alkalinity/pH The pH scale runs from 0 (most acidic) to 14 (most alkaline). Seven is neutral. A healthy pH, tested with first morning urine, is between 6.6 and 7.4. Even slight changes are significant, as the scale is logarithmic, meaning that a reading of 5 is 10 times more acidic than a reading of 6, and 100 times more acidic than a reading of 7. When we are too acidic, the body tries to buffer the acid by leaching alkalizing minerals, for instance calcium from our bones and teeth. The more acidic your body is, the more it is likely to break down. This means you are more susceptible not only to whatever microbes you are exposed to (viral, bacterial or fungal) but also to degenerative diseases from arthritis to cancer. Being more alkaline is consistent with a body that is able to build and repair tissue, muscles, organs, etc. What's one of the best ways to alkalize your body? Lots of green veggies!

Hydration Just as we know we should be having more veggies, most of us need to work on hydration too. When I test hydration for clients in my office, many are way below where the idea level. Being under-hydrated by as little as 10% can have a significant negative impact on your metabolism and your ability to detoxify from the normal stressors of daily life.

Whole Food Nutrition Scientists work hard to identify the beneficial nutrients in our food; corporations and the media follow by selling those nutrients to us as the latest cure-all. We will never be able to identify and isolate the myriad components nature

miraculously supplies. Plus, often when we think we've identified a "winner nutrient", isolating it robs it of its value. Nature already provides the perfect synergy, with not just the few nutrients we can identify, but all of them, the way they are intended to be utilized. While nutritional supplements, when used correctly, offer great benefit, nothing replaces real food, with all the nutrition of its natural synergy.

Enzymes Enzymes are the catalysts of all our biochemical reactions. They are fundamental to digestion, absorption and assimilation. Unfortunately, enzymes are destroyed by heat, even at low temperatures, Also, we tend to produce fewer enzymes as we age. Juicing with fresh raw veggies gives us a powerful enzymatic boost.

Interested in juicing, but not sure about how to start, or whether it's really worth investing in a juicer? Ask around. I recently replaced my 25 year old Acme with a new Breville, and in trying to find a new home for my perfectly serviceable Acme, I was surprised to find how many people had juicers at home just gathering dust. Borrow one for a few weeks and see how you do. Or buy an inexpensive juicer, but keep your expectations low: they are generally less convenient to use, and don't have strong enough motors to juice efficiently or last too long. I like the Breville's large feed chute (no chopping necessary!) and powerful motor, but there are many juicers with different features, and many places online you can check for reviews and comparisons.

Q&A

Q: Isn't it bad to lose all the fiber from the vegetables?

It's true that most of us could benefit from much more fiber in our diets, but removing the fiber in juicing is part of its power. No fiber means we are able to absorb and assimilate many times more nutrients from the vegetables than if we were eating them whole. It requires less digestion, so the nutrients recharge our system easily and quickly. Increase your fiber at meals, but juice, too.

Q: What about bottled juices from the store? Aren't they more convenient, and just as good?

No, not at all. Bottled juices are pasteurized; the heat of pasteurization kills the enzymes that make juicing so valuable. Also, bottled juices tend to be pretty sweet, high in sugars. They may be tasty but they don't have the dramatic benefits of fresh green juice.

Q: Are you a proponent of juice fasts?

No I am not. Fasting is hard on your system, and I believe there are much better ways to detoxify. Neither is fasting a good way to lose weight, as it slows and damages the metabolism. I do believe juicing is best done on an empty stomach, in-between meals. I like mine after an intense yoga practice, or instead of an afternoon snack.

What to Juice?

You can juice just about any produce you can eat, but here are some general suggestions.

1. **Choose a Base** This should be something fairly mild in flavor and fairly juicy, like cucumber, celery, or zucchini.
2. **Add some Dark Greens** These tend to be stronger flavored, and a little bitter, for instance: dandelion leaves, watercress, spinach, parsley, cilantro, lettuces, kale, chard, broccoli raab, etc. You can also save the stems from these to juice, and use the leaves in other dishes.
3. **Add Some Zest** You don't need a lot, but these pack a phytonutrient punch and really punch up the flavor, too. Try lemon or lime, ginger, onion, garlic, chives, radish or whole cranberries.
4. **Sweeteners** I encourage you to develop a palate for the flavors above, but if you must add some sweetness to start, try adding just one of the following: a small carrot or beet (these make your juice a gorgeous color!), an apple, or a few grapes. It is possible to make juices that taste good, and that are good for you too.

You truly don't need a recipe for juicing, but here is one of my current favorite combinations: 2 large cucumbers, a head of Romaine lettuce, one whole lemon, and about 1/2 cup of ginger root. See if you don't feel "lightened and brightened" after swigging some of that! Or send me your own favorite combinations; I'd love to hear from you.