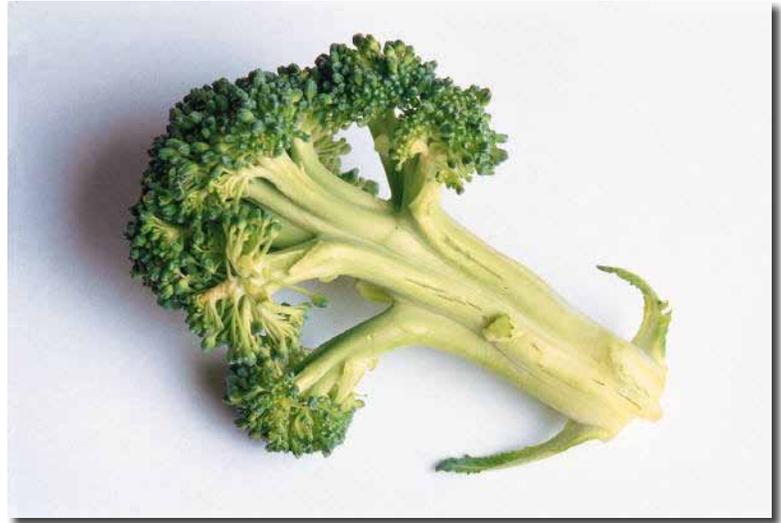




Sidekicks: Brussels sprouts, cabbage, kale, turnips, cauliflower, collards, bok choy, mustard greens, Swiss chard.

Broccoli contains:

- Sulforaphane
- Indoles
- Folate
- Fiber
- Calcium
- Vitamin C
- Beta-carotene
- Lutein/Zeaxanthin
- Vitamin K



It was 1992 and then President George Bush made a daring proclamation: “I’m president of the United States and I’m not going to eat any more broccoli.” The horrified gasps of nutritionists could be heard from sea to shining sea. But in the end, broccoli triumphed. Perhaps in part because of the president’s statement, the press took up the cause of broccoli, and anyone who’d doubted its power as one of our most valuable foods ultimately became a believer.

The timing was right for broccoli: in that same year, a researcher at Johns Hopkins University announced the discovery of a compound found in broccoli that not only prevented the development of tumors by 60 percent in the studied group, it also reduced the size of tumors that did develop by 75 percent. Broccoli is now one of the best-selling vegetables in the United States. Broccoli is an excellent source of vegetarian iron.

Raw vs. cooked

Raw and cooked crucifers provide different anticancer phytonutrients. The raw vegetable has more vitamin C, but cooking makes the carotenoids more bioavailable. Eat these vegetables both raw and cooked to get maximum cancer protection and health benefits. I like raw broccoli florets with a low-fat dip and raw shredded red cabbage combined with spinach in salads.

Eating broccoli or its sidekicks is like getting a natural dose of chemoprevention. One study showed that eating about two servings a day of crucifers may result in as much as a 50 percent reduction in the risk for certain types of cancers. While all crucifers seem to be effective in fighting cancer, cabbage, broccoli, and Brussels sprouts seem to be the most powerful. Just ½ cup of broccoli a day protects from a number of cancers, particularly cancers of the lung, stomach, colon, and rectum. No wonder broccoli is number one on the National Cancer Institute’s list of nutrition all stars.

It’s all better with broccoli

If broccoli did nothing but protect us from cancer, that would be enough, but this mighty vegetable works on other fronts as well.

Broccoli and its related crucifers are rich in folate, the B vitamin that is essential to preventing birth defects. Neural tube defects like spina bifida have been linked to folic acid deficiency in pregnancy. A single cup of raw, chopped broccoli provides more than 50 milligrams of folate (the plant form of folic acid). Folate also is active in helping to remove homocysteine from the circulatory system; high levels of homocysteine are associated with cardiovascular disease. Folate also plays a role in cancer prevention. Interestingly, folic acid deficiency may be the most common vitamin deficiency in the world.

We all know how common cataracts are in our aging population. Broccoli to the rescue! Broccoli is rich in the powerful phytochemical carotenoid antioxidants lutein and zeaxanthin (as well as vitamin C). Both of these carotenoids are concentrated in the lens and retina of the eye. A single cup of raw, chopped broccoli provides 1.5 milligrams of lutein and Zeaxanthin—8 percent of the Super Foods RX goal of 12 milligrams daily. One study found that people who ate broccoli more than twice weekly had a 23 percent lower risk of cataracts when compared to those who ate broccoli less than once a month. Lutein/zeaxanthin and vitamin C also serve to protect the eyes from the free-radical damage done to the eyes by ultraviolet light.

Broccoli and cruciferous vegetables are bone builders. One cup of raw broccoli provides 41 milligrams of calcium along with 79 milligrams of vitamin C, which promotes the absorption of calcium. While this is not a huge amount of calcium, it's at a low cost of calories and with the benefit of the many other nutrients in broccoli. Whole milk and other full-fat dairy products, long touted as the main sources of calcium, contain no vitamin C and are often loaded with saturated fat and many more calories than the 25 in 1 cup of raw, chopped broccoli. Broccoli also supplies a significant portion of vitamin K, which is important for blood clotting, and also contributes to bone health.

Broccoli is a great source of the flavonoids, carotenoids, vitamin C, folate, and potassium that help prevent heart disease. It also provides generous amounts of fiber, vitamin E, and vitamin B6, which promote cardiovascular health. Broccoli is one of the few vegetables, along with spinach, that are relatively high in coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10), a fat-soluble antioxidant that is a major contributor to the production of energy in our bodies. At least in people with diagnosed heart disease, CoQ10 may play a cardioprotective role.