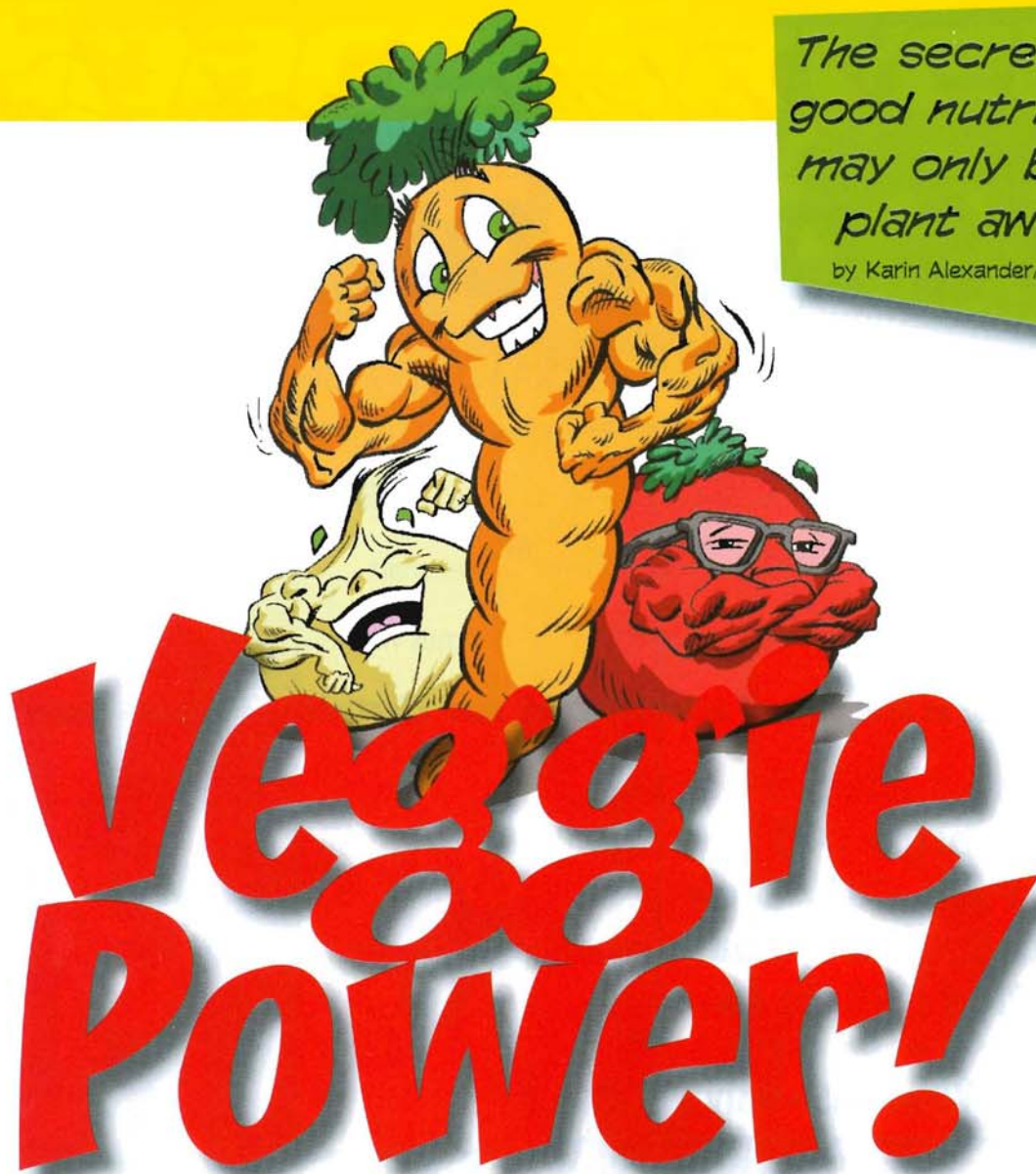


*The secret of  
good nutrition  
may only be a  
plant away*

by Karin Alexander, J.D.



Yeah, I know. You've heard "Eat your vegetables!" since you were a kid. We know there are ones you don't like, ranging from icky to downright disgusting. Fair enough. So why am I going to spend time talking about Brussels sprouts when we know you'd rather be opening a bag of potato chips? Because vegetables are important, not only to your health but also to your success as an athlete.

Vegetables, especially the brightly- and dark-colored ones, are loaded with vitamins and minerals that power the whole machine called your body. Without sufficient vitamins and minerals, your body just won't work and it cannot properly use any of the other foods you consume.

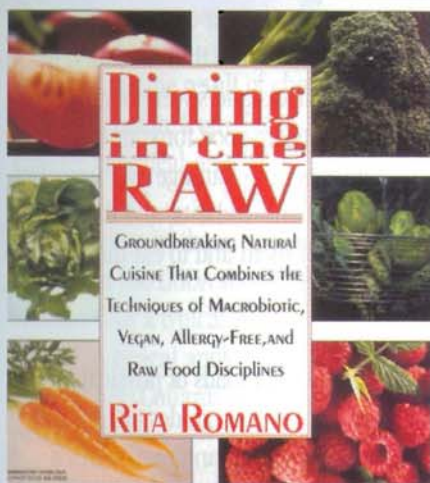
It's unfortunate that so few athletes treat their bodies like the fine examples of construction and workmanship that they are. How often have you heard how important it is to put premium fuel into cars? Would you put vegetable oil in your car? Then why would you consume chips, soda and a white bread-bologna-and-mayonnaise sandwich for lunch? How could you possibly expect your body to function properly? Poor nutrition will make your mornings sluggish, put you in a bad mood, cause you to lose focus in the classroom and affect your athletic performance. You need to fuel your machine properly, and that means that the quality of fuel needed for your body is a lot higher than the quality of fuel you put into your car.

### **The ABCs of Veggies**

Vitamins and minerals are called "micronutrients," whereas macronutrients are the fats, proteins and carbohydrates that provide calories for energy and tissue building. The micronutrients



"I incorporate food recipes when I see it. You'll love Rita's recipes!"  
—Marilyn Diamond, co-author of *DIET FOR LIFE*



Rita Romano's "Dining in the Raw" is an excellent resource for learning how to prepare vegetables.

"A classic recipe book...a valuable contribution to the advancement of diet and services."  
—Viktor Kabanov, author of *SURVIVAL INTO THE 21ST CENTURY*

are absolutely essential for your body to be able to properly use the macronutrients you consume. In addition to containing vitamins and minerals, vegetables are an excellent source of fiber. Without sufficient fiber, nothing in your body is going to work properly.

Vegetables and fruits are essential players in the game to fight off the biggies in diseases that could ruin your life in the not-so-distant future. These include heart disease; strokes; eye ailments that can cause blindness, such as macular degeneration and cataracts; and many types of cancer. Fruits and vegetables simply are the most important components of diet when it comes to avoiding these illnesses and having a strong, active and healthy body in the future. But for now, you want to win the game, kick butt at the meet and make a new personal best in the weight-room! That's definitely going to require some power veggies.

Different sources have different recommendations for the number of servings of vegetables required each day for optimal health. These range from 5 (Tufts University) to 13 per day (the National Cancer Institute and various other universities and nutritionists), depending on one's calorie intake. For example, if you are a linebacker and therefore going heavy on the calories, load up with 9-13 servings. Your high calorie intake means your body is using higher levels of nutrients in the first place. At more than 2,000 calories per day, you need to be eating at least 9 servings.

If you are a gymnast or other weight-conscious athlete, such as a wrestler attempting to move into a lower weight class, you can hold consumption to the 5-servings-per-day level. But definitely don't drop below that for optimum power and health.

While 5 to 9 servings of fruits and vegetables don't sound like that much (that's a maximum requirement of two vegetables per meal and three fruit snacks or desserts per day), that's a whole lot more than the typical American eats. And think about your diet. If you are a bacon-and eggs-breakfast sort of person, a hamburger-with-fries-for-lunch sort of person, and a meat-and-potatoes-with-a-salad-for-dinner person, you are in big trouble. (Yes, we know the government counts French fries and ketchup as vegetables, but who is that supposed to fool? Those items are junk food—primarily sugar, pure and simple—and their nutritional content is about nil. Additionally, their high levels of unhealthy components like trans fats and sugar mean you need to eat additional servings of real vegetables to compensate for eating those junk veggies!)

If this describes your diet, you are at least four servings behind just in meeting the minimum requirement. That means you are eating about what the standard American diet (called "SAD," for good reason) provides, along with incurring large doses of risk for diet- and lifestyle-induced diabetes, even among teenagers, and a hugely increased risk of cancers, in general. And that just won't cut the mustard (or the broccoli, for that matter). It's time to get serious about vegetable consumption, and now!

## Phyto What is It?

In addition to their vitamin and mineral content, vegetables in general, and certain types of vegetables specifically, provide large amounts of what are called "phytochemicals." This translates





into “plant chemicals” (leave it to the scientists to call plants “phytos”). But phytochemicals are crucial to your health. They are critical to fighting off many types of cancer, including cancers of the mouth and throat, kidney, bladder, stomach, lung, ovary and colon. Vegetables that provide especially large amounts of helpful phytochemicals include broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts and the other “stinky” vegetables. Find out how to cook these in a way that you like, and eat them every week (OK, maybe not the Brussels sprouts). In addition, tomatoes have a component called lycopene, which gives them their red color. Lycopene gives protection against prostate cancer (tell Dad) and possibly some types of nonmalignant uterine tumors (tell Mom).

## Fiber Follies

Greatly underestimated in the standard American approach to food is the importance of a food component that provides no nutrition whatsoever. It has no calories, and it contributes no vitamins, minerals, fats or protein. And yet, you just gotta have it. That component is fiber. There are a couple of types of fiber and each is important.

First there is water-soluble fiber, such as the squishy type in oats. This type has been shown to have a beneficial effect on cholesterol levels and can absorb other potentially harmful substances. Then there is insoluble fiber. This is the stuff your body can do nothing with from a digestion standpoint. Absolutely nothing. It's like trying to digest plastic or paper. It's just filler or roughage. But it is a big deal.

Insoluble fiber sweeps your food along in the lower digestive tract, scrubs the walls clean, reduces pressure in the intestinal tract, thereby preventing damage, and carries out harmful substances. This is the stuff that keeps the whole system moving along smoothly and makes its absence painfully clear when things don't move along as they should! Be sure to get plenty of high-fiber vegetables, along with fruits. These include celery (didn't you wonder what those strings in celery that you can't even chew are for?), broccoli, beans and many others. You really can't go wrong in eating enough vegetables to get the fiber that your body needs—and French fries won't do it!

## Antioxidants

Additionally, vegetables provide high levels of important vitamins and minerals that act as antioxidants in the body. These work to absorb the dangerous byproducts of natural body processes, such as the metabolic process and digestion, as well as to protect your body against the damage caused by sunlight, pollution, smoking, stress and infections.

Some of the most important antioxidants, in addition to vitamins E and C and alpha-lipoic acid, are beta-carotenes. These are components of the family of carotenoids that are found in high levels in vegetables such as carrots and sweet potatoes. That's why you've heard that carrots are good for your eyes. Carotenoids do help protect the eyes from damage over time. But all vegetables provide some helpful antioxidants, and the key is to eat plenty, to eat a wide variety of them and to eat them fresh.

## Super B's

If you are a typical athlete, you're under loads of physical and mental stress. You are working to keep your grades up, possibly trying to get into the college of your choice and maybe win a scholarship, and you have the constant pressure of the field and weightroom. You know it's tough. That's where the B vitamins come in.

B vitamins help the body cope with mental and physical stress without losing its energy or becoming depleted. In addition, you may have noticed how you want to eat more sugar when you're stressed—you know that desperate urge for a Twinkie! Well, B's help with that too, and they help your body deal with sugar to help protect your health. They also help your body build proteins, the basic structure of everything from muscles to hair. Don't expect to build muscles without eating enough vegetables with the B vitamins. For high levels of B's eat your veggies, particularly spinach, broccoli and greens.

## Vegetables without Nutrients

OK. So let's say you are eating your 5 to 13 servings of vegetables and fruit per day and getting good variety. Are you doing everything you need to protect your health, energy and performance? Maybe not. That's because you need to consider where your vegetables came from and how they were prepared. In a shocking evaluation of the US Department of Agriculture's food tables, nutritionist Alex Jack noticed that the nutritional content of common vegetables had plummeted over the last couple of decades. In looking at the table from 1999, he noticed a huge decrease in the levels of vitamins and minerals from a comparable table from 1975.

For example, the newest table indicated a 50 percent decrease in the amount of calcium in broccoli, a 40 percent decrease in the amount of vitamin C in cauliflower and an 88 percent decrease in the iron content of watercress (the English love this stuff; Americans, not so much). Alex Jack asked Dan Glickman, the Secretary of Agriculture at the time, what could account for the decreases, but Glickman never responded. It is likely that the




decreases are the result of changing agricultural methods and from the change from natural, balanced fertilizers in favor of simpler, chemical ones.

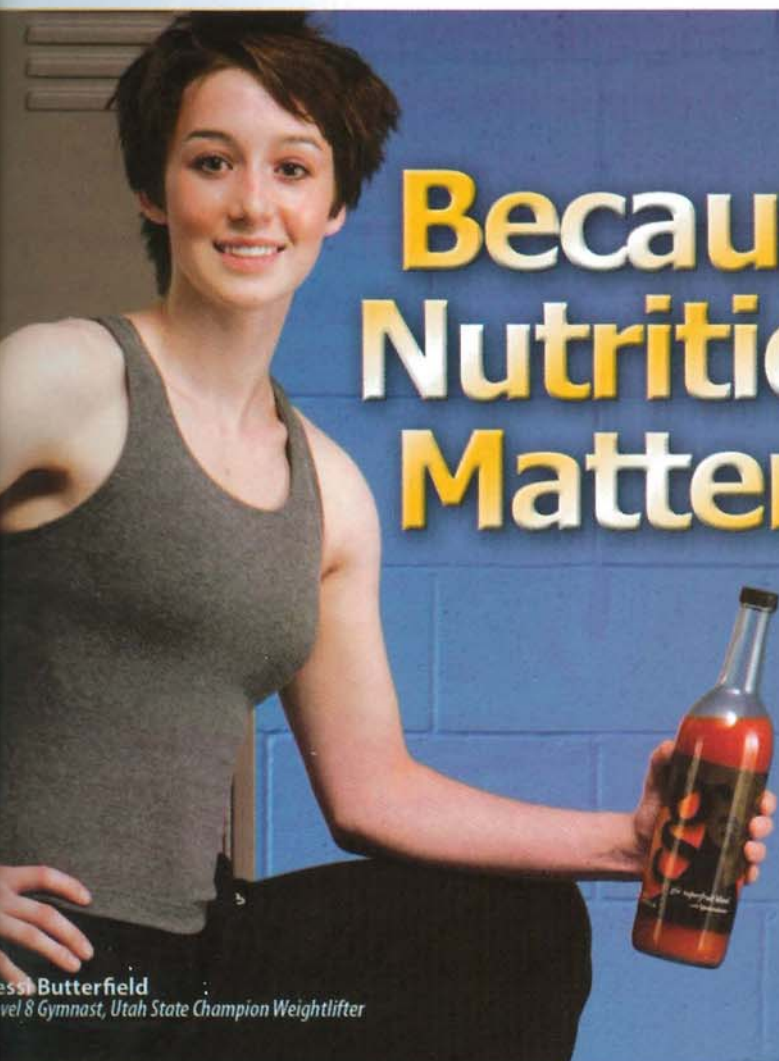
The decreases in the nutritional levels get even worse. A 1963 table from the USDA shows that since that time, the level of vitamin C in a typical sweet pepper plummeted from 128 mg to 89 mg! A typical apple now has only 53 mg of vitamin A rather than 90 mg. Collards now have 3,800 IU's of vitamin A compared with the 6,500 units they once had. Their potassium content fell from 400 mg down to 160 mg. And levels of magnesium, the heart-protecting mineral, dropped from 57 mg to a mere 9 in collards! This trend has occurred with some fruits as well. For example, pineapple now has lost most of its calcium—from 17 mg per 100 grams down to just 7 mgs. And I don't even want to know what has happened to the nutritional content of our now typically hydroponically grown tasteless tomatoes!

In response to this phenomenon, the National Academy of Sciences issued an alert to the public stating that it now takes

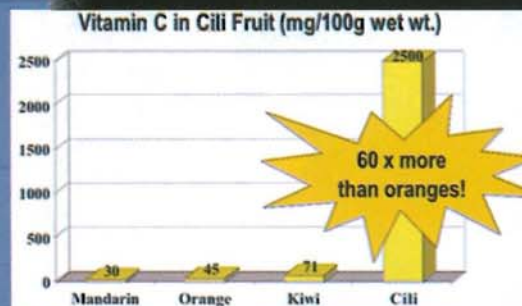
twice as many fruits and vegetables for us to get our daily requirement of vitamin A than was previously thought. And clearly, the problem is not limited to vitamin A. Top off that problem with the tendency for people to eat processed vegetables—either canned or frozen—and you can see that Americans are in a nutritional crisis. While frozen vegetables tend to have normal levels of nutrients—down to about 10 percent less than fresh, canned vegetables suffer terribly from nutrient loss. And even premature picking timetables and transportation methods are further depleting vegetables and fruits of their vital nutrition, making them not at all the same foods that our grandparents ate.

So, what to do? Start off by eating as many fresh, raw or slightly cooked vegetables as possible. Add fresh fruit. And top them off with a pharmaceutical-grade nutritional aid such as Lifepak, taken with meals, to help close the gap. Also note that organic vegetables have a vastly higher nutritional content. Although they cost a lot more, you will be getting more bang for your buck. Whatever you do, just "Eat your vegetables!" 

## Because Nutrition Matters!



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