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SPINACH PACKS A POWERFUL PUNCH!

As children we watch Popeye, the cartoon character, transform into a muscle man when he eats his spinach. In real life spinach doesn't build muscle, but it does pack a powerful punch full of nutrients. Hardly any other vegetable provides so much nutrition for so little calories. The list of nutrients is long...vitamin A, vitamin E, vitamin K, folic acid, iron, calcium, potassium, magnesium, and fiber. If that wasn't enough already, it's loaded with the antioxidants lutein and zeaxanthin.

Hopefully you're convinced by now that it should be a weekly item in your diet. If family members claim they don't like it, just sneak a few leaves into their salad to boost nutritional value. Just a few leaves will make a difference and they'll barely notice it if you tear it into small pieces. Other tricks are to add it to soup, spaghetti sauce, and casseroles.

Spinach is in season right now so shop while prices are lower. My personal favorite is to buy it just picked from my local farmer's market. The taste is superior to the bagged varieties. Once you've had it, you won't be satisfied with anything else.

Store fresh spinach in your vegetable crisper by putting it in a sealed container or plastic bag. It will quickly wilt and change flavor, so use it in two to three days. Our recipe for spinach soup is good for leaves that are past their prime.

Frozen and canned spinach is just as nutritious as fresh but not as tasty. It costs less so is a great choice for cooked dishes. Use frozen over canned to avoid the added salt.

FRESH SPINACH SOUP

1 large onion, chopped
1 tablespoon butter or margarine
1 pound fresh spinach leaves, washed and drained
1 medium potato, peeled and quartered
1 can beef broth
1 cup hot water
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1 clove garlic, minced
1/2 cup skim milk
2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese

Sauté onion in butter or margarine in an electric skillet. Add spinach, potato, beef broth, water, pepper, and garlic. Bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes until

potato is tender. Spoon half of the spinach mixture into electric mixer container and process until smooth. Repeat with remaining spinach mixture. Pour back into electric skillet and stir in milk. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until thoroughly heated. Pour into bowls to serve and sprinkle with 1 teaspoon Parmesan cheese. Makes 6 servings.

HOT SPINACH DIP

2 packages frozen spinach, thawed
1 can cream of celery soup
10 ounces Monterey Jack cheese with jalapeno peppers, cubed

Thaw spinach. Combine spinach and soup in saucepan. Heat over medium heat stirring until well blended. Add cubed cheese and heat mixture until cheese is melted. Serve hot with whole wheat crackers or pita bread.

SPINACH QUICHE

1 (10 oz.) package frozen chopped spinach, thawed
1 unbaked 10" deep dish pie shell
2 tablespoons margarine
1 cup diced onion
1 pound ground beef or Italian sausage
1 (4 oz.) can mushrooms, drained
3/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1/8 teaspoon nutmeg
1 clove garlic
2 large eggs
1 cup cream
1/2 cup grated sharp cheddar or Swiss cheese

Thaw and drain spinach. Heat oven to 400°. Prick pie shell and bake 15 minutes. Remove from oven and set aside. Melt margarine in skillet and sauté diced onions. Add meat and cook until brown. Drain well. In a bowl mix meat, mushrooms and onion with spinach, salt, pepper, nutmeg, and garlic. Beat eggs with cream and stir into meat mixture. Pour into pie shell and top with cheese. Turn oven down to 375° and bake 30 minutes until top is speckled brown and filling is set.

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