



Catching Up with the Japanese

by the American Institute for Cancer Research

There are many differences between the Japanese and American diets that may explain why cancer rates in Japan are far lower than in the U.S. But one difference may be overlooked: The Japanese consume about five times the amount of cruciferous vegetables as Americans do.

Cruciferous vegetables include cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, Chinese cabbage, cauliflower, kale, watercress, radish, parsnip, turnip, rutabaga and kohlrabi.

How Cruciferous Vegetables Fight Cancer

Cruciferous vegetables make a unique contribution to good health. They contain natural substances called glucosinolates that break down in the body to form indoles and other compounds that fight cancer development in several different ways.

One way indoles and other anti-cancer compounds from cruciferous vegetables work is by lowering down proteins in the body that activate carcinogenic substances. (Proteins are the active elements of cells that aid and control the chemical reactions that make the cell work.) Another way is by speeding up proteins that detoxify carcinogens. These compounds can also increase the self-destruction of cancer cells and stop or slow down the growth of cells developing into cancer.

Population studies link an increased eating of cruciferous vegetables with a lower risk for a variety of cancers. Breast cancer is one of them. The other cancers are colon, lung and ovarian cancers. Some studies also show a protective influence during the early stages of prostate cancer development.

Preparing Cruciferous Vegetables

Don't let memories of overcooked, slightly bitter dishes stop you from eating cruciferous vegetables. All you need is the desire to eat well, along with some preparation pointers:

- Cook these vegetables only until tender. Overcooking produces bitterness.
- Avoid boiling them in lots of water because this method leaches nutrients.
- Briefly steaming or stir-frying these vegetables produces much better flavor and texture.
- Try roasting them. Parsnips and Brussels sprouts are especially delicious when roasted.
- If salad greens aren't in season, switch to fresher and less expensive salads based on raw broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower.
- Smooth out the strong flavors of these vegetables with equally assertive flavorings, like a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil or balsamic vinegar.

For more helpful tips and some easy healthy recipes, go to the American Institute for Cancer Research's website, www.aicr.org. It offers a searchable database of healthy, delicious recipes in the "Recipe Corner." You can also visit the website www.5aday.com. This website has a searchable database, so you can look for recipes that call for a particular vegetable like broccoli.