

Seeing Mushrooms in a New Light

by the American Institute for Cancer Research

In Asia, mushrooms have been used as food and medicine for thousands of years. More than 50 species are considered to have healing properties. In Japan, for example, an extract of the Shitake mushroom is used clinically as a cancer treatment. Western scientists, however, are just beginning to study the compounds in these distinctive foods.

Some Beneficial Compounds Known

One substance in mushrooms that may make them a good part of a healthy diet is the mineral selenium. When partnered with another antioxidant, vitamin E, selenium may help neutralize “free radicals” (unstable molecules that damage cells) and prevent genetic damage that leads to prostate cancer.

Out of all compounds identified and studied so far in mushrooms, certain polysaccharides seem to possess the most anti-cancer potential. These polysaccharides are also known as beta-glucans. The beta-glucan polysaccharides that have been extracted from mushrooms and used in clinical trials include Lentinan, Schizophyllan, PSK, PSP and Grifon-D. Some studies suggest that polysaccharides may increase the quality of life of patients and their survival for some cancers, especially when used in combination with conventional treatments. But how these polysaccharides work is not entirely known.

Research continues, but you don't need to wait to make mushrooms part of your regular diet. Try this simple dish and experiment with the mushrooms you use.

Bok Choy with Sautéed Mushrooms and Shallots

2 tsp. canola or olive oil
1 package (8 oz) sliced mushrooms
2 shallots, minced
1 garlic clove, minced
1 ½ pounds bok choy or napa cabbage, rinsed and chopped into 1-inch pieces
2 tsp. lite soy sauce
1 tsp. lemon zest
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

In large skillet or wok, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add mushrooms, shallots and garlic and stir-fry until mushrooms darken, about 5 minutes.

Add bok choy or napa cabbage and stir-fry for about 8 to 10 minutes until tender. Sprinkle with soy sauce, lemon zest and salt and pepper to taste. Serve.

Makes 4 servings. Per serving: 60 calories, 3 g. total fat (<1 g. saturated fat), 7 g. carbohydrates, 4 g. protein, 2 g. dietary fiber, 197 mg. sodium.

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