

Pack a Power Picnic by the American Institute for Cancer Research

In the corporate world, people sometimes have a “power lunch” to discuss business. This summer, for your health and eating pleasure, you should try to power picnic. Fill your cooler or old-fashioned basket mostly with fresh vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans. These plant foods are full of phytochemicals-powerful substances that help protect your health and prevent cancer.

Think of plant foods as natural health kits. They contain vitamins, minerals, fiber and thousands of phytochemicals. Although our bodies cannot manufacture phytochemicals, scientific research shows that these substances bolster the body’s immune system and neutralize toxins.

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Some phytochemicals that have shown ability to protect health are: gingerol in ginger, allicin in garlic, ellagic acid in cranberries and glutathione in asparagus. Many phytochemicals, however, have yet to be studied. Researchers believe that the more we find out about them, the more reasons we’ll have to eat vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans daily in abundance.

A World about Wheat

When choosing your bread, pasta, rice or other grains foods, it’s important to pick whole grain products. Research has discovered that whole grains contain phytochemicals like lignans, flavonoids and saponins. Brown rice is noted for protease inhibitors and oryzanol. Bread made from whole grains instead of refined flour also has more fiber, vitamin E and selenium, all of which help prevent cancer.

To tell if you’re buying whole grain bread, the first word listed in the ingredients should be ‘whole.’ Sometimes, enriched flour breads are tinted with caramel coloring to resemble whole wheat. You should also check the nutrition facts panels to find the whole grain bread with the greatest amount of fiber per slice.

To start your picnic plans for better health, try this satisfying salad as your main dish. Finish the meal with a fresh fruit salad for a real phytochemical feast.

White Bean Salad with Asparagus

5 stalks green asparagus, tough stems removed
1 can (15oz.) white beans, rinsed and drained
1 orange bell pepper, seeded and chopped
½ cup finely chopped red onion
2 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
2 Tbsp. freshly squeezed lemon juice
1 tsp. Dijon mustard
Salt and pepper, to taste
1 cup leafy salad greens, loosely packed

Cut asparagus into one inch pieces. In vegetable steamer set into large saucepan, lightly steam 2-3 minutes. Set aside to cool. In large bowl, combine white beans, orange pepper and red onion. Gently toss in asparagus. In separate bowl, whisk together olive oil, lemon juice, mustard salt and pepper. Gently pour dressing into beans mixture. Adjust seasonings to taste. Line salad bowl with leafy greens. Top greens with white bean salad. Serve with hearty whole grain bread.

Makes 5 servings. Per serving: 134 calories, 6 g. total fat (<1 g. saturated fat), 16 g. carbohydrate, 4 g. protein, 5 g. dietary fiber, 156 mg. sodium.

For more inspiration planning healthy meals throughout the year, subscribe to the quarterly American Institute for Cancer Research Newsletter. It's free and full of recipes. You can sign up online at www.aicr.org/publications/news.lasso.