

SUSTAINABLE LIVING GUIDE: 40. WHOLE FOOD EATING

1. Peeling Your Fruits and Vegetables? You Could Be Missing Most of the Nutrients¹

Sara Novak©

If you're a regular reader of mine, then you know I'm a huge fan of Christina Pirello and her show *Christina Cooks*. And over the years her show has taught me some great pieces of whole foods information, namely that we should keep our foods whole. That's right, Christina rarely peels fruits and vegetables because many of the nutrients are found in the peels. It's similar to eating head-to-tail but with produce. None of your precious local produce is wasted and you get all those wonderful nutrients.

First off, your best bet for the planet and for your health is choosing organic fruits and vegetables, so that when you do eat the whole fruit, you don't also ingest all those nasty pesticides and herbicides. That waxy finish that you find on so many apples, peppers, rutabagas, etc. isn't healthy. Local produce is also important when it comes to eating from the outside in because fruits and vegetables lose much of the nutrients that you're craving when they travel 1,500 miles.

Avoid Peeling Altogether

Certain fruits and vegetables have peels so thin and tasty that you should avoid peeling them whenever possible. Peeling apples, tomatoes, grapes, eggplant, pears, potatoes, and most fruits and vegetables where the skin is thin enough to easily pierce with your thumbnail, is a waste of elbow grease. Much of the insoluble fiber and antioxidants are located in the skin. For example, much of the potassium, fiber, and B vitamins are found in a potato's skin. And much of the anti-cancer benefits like the polyphenols of an apple are found in the skin as well as the pectin, which is known for its ability to lower cholesterol and blood sugar levels. Beyond health benefits, peeling fruits and vegetables like eggplant and cucumbers removes the color element and when you consider that we eat with our eyes before we ever take a bite, colorful peels become quite important.

Preparing Citrus Peels

While you're likely not going to just snack on an orange peel because it's just not that tasty, the zest of citrus fruits like oranges and lemons is delicious when you want to add intense citrus flavoring to your favorite dishes. You can also pickle the peels of lemons and fingered citrus and turn them into a limoncello. And even if you don't want to eat the peels, dried out citrus peels make a great addition to potpourri.

When You Can't Eat the Peel, What Should You Do With It?

While you may not want to eat thicker peels like winter squashes and pumpkins, you can still

¹ Planet Green, August 29, 2010

put them to use. Carefully gut pumpkins and acorn squashes and then use the peels to house the finished dish. This restaurant quality presentation will go a long way to please your guests.

2. Improve Digestion Naturally Through Mindful Eating²

Dena Smith Givens[©]

So, you are eating organic, local, and seasonal. Healthy right? Maybe not as much as you think. If you are inhaling your healthful eco-friendly meal while darting through rush hour traffic, reading e-mail, or watching your favorite nighttime drama on TV, you might as well be indulging in that donut you passed up this morning. The reason is that proper digestion and the absorption of nutrients are affected by the hormonal and chemical balance in our body.

Intrinsically, we all know that whole foods, such as fruit, vegetables, and whole grains are best for us. But in our hectic modern lives, we often put more focus on what to eat, rather than the manner in which we consume our food. Just as we need time to prepare our bodies for a restful night's sleep, preparing our bodies for eating will not only enhance the experience, it will improve our health through optimizing the nutrition that our food provides.

Here are some suggestions to help you get started:

- (1) **Slow Down:** We are a society of fast food eaters. Our food is not only made fast, but consumed fast. By consciously slowing down – eating more home-prepared meals and taking the proper time to eat them – the delayed gratification causes us to appreciate and enjoy our food even more. Chewing slowly also aids in faster digestion and a reduction in gas and bloating.
- (2) **Prepare Your Body, Mind & Spirit:** Maintain proper posture and breathing while eating. Washing up or changing clothing before a meal has been a ritual in cultures around the world for centuries, as is saying a prayer or blessing. These traditions demonstrate respect, reverence, and appreciation for both the meal itself, and the person who made it (which may be yourself).
- (3) **Prepare Your Space:** It's a shame that candles, linens, and fine china are usually reserved for guests or "special occasions." Make everyday special by incorporating quality dishware and place settings into your mealtimes. Even brown bag lunches can be more enjoyable, and eco-friendly, by replacing your plastic with metal and other aesthetically-pleasing, reusable materials. Fresh air, sunshine, and beautiful surroundings can also enhance mealtimes.
- (4) **Avoid Distractions:** Eating in a quiet, peaceful, and comfortable environment allows you to relax and focus on the process of eating. You may discover a new love of food as you become more aware of the flavors, textures, colors, and aroma of your meals. Conversations during a meal can be enjoyable if the topic stays positive. Eating alone can also be a pleasurable, and sacred, experience.
- (5) **Develop a Rhythm:** When eating in accordance to our body's natural digestive cycle, we are able to more efficiently absorb and process nutrients, and fully eliminate food debris and

² Team Planet Green, February 19, 2009

toxins. Eating fresh, raw fruit in the morning assists in the process of elimination, while eating the majority of our calories from about noon until 8:00 pm gives us the fuel and energy we need to get through our day. Refraining from food at night gives our bodies time to assimilate nutrients and rest. Many people find an increase in energy as a result.

- (6) **Carefully Combine Foods:** Pregnant women may have a hard time with this one but the rest of us might want to consider it. Indigestion is a common result of improper food combining. Fruit is ideally best when eaten alone and on an empty stomach, or at least 15 minutes before a meal. This is because it requires very little digestion and is processed by the body very quickly. Animal foods, on the other hand, take stronger stomach acid to break them down and they stay in our bodies much longer, so they are better eaten with vegetables or alone. Starches digest well with non-starch vegetables but some people report problems when mixing starches with animal protein.

Each one of us is very unique, as are our individual lifestyles and circumstances. What may work for one person may be a disaster for another. Experiment with these tips and find what works best for you. Be bold and express your own unique nutrition style.