

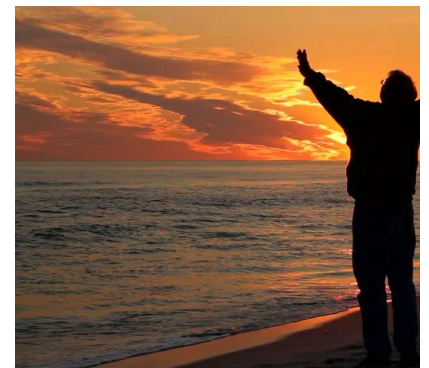
Ask the Expert:

Why is Vitamin D an Essential Vitamin?

Written by Madison Wathen, Purdue University Nutrition and Dietetics '25

Vitamin D is important for staying healthy and critical to bone and dental health.

Known as the “sunshine vitamin”, vitamin D can come from a number of sources, one major source is the sun. During the sunny times of the year, sunlight can be converted into usable vitamin D when bare skin is exposed to sunlight. However, in the winter, the position of the sun in Indiana and northern states is less direct and vitamin D can not be created in skin. This means that we can't get vitamin D from just being outside on a sunny day. The good news is that vitamin D can also come from food.



Some foods have naturally occurring vitamin D like fatty fish, beef liver, and egg yolks. Other foods are fortified, meaning vitamin D is added to them to increase their nutritional value. However, vitamin D in foods might still not be enough to meet the recommendations for promoting health. Most Americans have low levels of vitamin D where supplementation might be helpful, especially in the winter when taken under the supervision of a registered dietitian or medical doctor.



Vitamin D is important in muscle and bone health because of its role in making sure minerals like calcium, magnesium, and phosphorus are added to bones. Muscle weakness, bone and joint pain, and depression are all signs of a vitamin D deficiency. Infants, children, adults, and older people are all at risk for not getting enough vitamin D. You can request vitamin D levels to be checked at your next primary care visit to better understand your vitamin D status.

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Food Safety: Spread the Joy with Food Safety

Written by Emma Araya, Purdue University Dietetics and Nutrition, Fitness and Health '26

As the holiday season creeps upon us, it's important to keep safe food handling practices in mind. Part of the holidays is spending time with friends and family and it's important to make sure everyone is informed about food safety hazards. Spread the joy of food and not the risks of harmful bacteria with these food safety tips:

- **Make sure to defrost food correctly**

- o Frozen foods should never be thawed at room temperature, on the counter, or in hot water. Foods that are frozen should be thawed in the fridge or in a bowl filled with cold water before cooking.

- **Keep hands clean**

- o Make sure to wash your hands before, during, and after food preparation. This is especially essential when switching tasks like handling raw meat to cutting vegetables to avoid cross-contamination.

- **Cook food thoroughly**

- o Always make sure that food is cooked fully before serving. For example, the internal temperature for poultry should be 165F to make sure that food-borne pathogens are destroyed.

- **Avoid eating foods containing raw eggs and flour**

- o Although tempting, it's best to avoid eating foods containing raw eggs. Uncooked batter and dough can have harmful pathogens like E. Coli and Salmonella. Make sure food is cooked thoroughly to avoid getting sick with a foodborne illness.

Practicing these easy food safety tips can help you and your family avoid foodborne illness and sickness this holiday season. Happy Holidays!



Sources: <https://www.eatright.org/food/cultural-cuisines-and-traditions/holidays-and-celebrations/10-holiday-home-food-safety-tips> <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/communication/holidays.html>

Pumpkin Ricotta Stuffed Shells

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350F.
2. Cook pasta shells in boiling water. Drain and place in baking sheet to cool.
3. In a bowl, mix together ricotta cheese, pumpkin, spices and 1 tbsp of parmesan cheese.
4. Spread spaghetti sauce on the bottom of a baking dish before placing shells on top.
5. Fill each shell with 3 tbsp of pumpkin mixture. Add the rest of parmesan cheese on top.
6. Cover baking dish in foil and bake for 30 minutes. Enjoy!

Ingredients (12 servings)

- 6 ounces of jumbo pasta shells (about 12 jump pasta shells)
- 1 1/4 cup ricotta cheese
- 3/4 cup pumpkin (fresh or canned)*
- 2 cloves of garlic (or 1/4 tsp of garlic powder)
- 2 tsp basil
- 1/4 tsp sage (dried or fresh)
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp black pepper
- 1/2 cup parmesan cheese
- 1 cup spaghetti sauce

Source: <https://www.myplate.gov/recipes/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/pumpkin-ricotta-stuffed-shells>



Nutrition Facts (per serving)

Calories: 128
Protein: 7g
Carbs: 17g
Fat: 4g

***foods included in the TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program)**

Eating Right:

Balanced Eating During The Holidays

Written by Abby Rosborough, Purdue University Biomedical Health Sciences, Nutrition, and Biology '26.

The holiday season is a busy time due to family gatherings and get-togethers with friends. Many of these events may include sharing food and potluck style dining. However, it's important to learn how to keep healthy habits throughout all of it. These tips can help you to enjoy good food while keeping a balanced lifestyle:

- Eating before a party or event

o Avoid becoming overly full and the discomfort and nausea that may follow by having a small snack before the event so that you do not overeat.

- Starting with one normal-sized plate

o Taking small amounts of each food can help you enjoy all the flavors while checking overall hunger level. Then, if you are still hungry, you can go back for more and if not, you can avoid feeling like you must finish eating those large portions.



- Including at least one vegetable on your plate

o Making sure to get at least one vegetable can help you meet the recommendation of five fruits and vegetables a day. Choosing additional vegetables and fruits is even better!

- Filling up with fiber-rich foods

o Making sure to consume enough fiber will keep you full for longer and help aid digestion. Choosing foods like nuts, beans, fruits, and vegetables with your meals can help prevent constipation.

Having a balanced holiday season does not mean giving up on your nutrition goals or avoiding all the fun holiday food. It gives us a chance to get more in tune with our hunger cues and make balanced choices that keep us healthy.





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This newsletter is edited by Emma Araya and Heather A. Eicher-Miller, PhD and is created by the Eicher-Miller Lab in the Department of Nutrition Science at Purdue University. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

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In The News: November was Diabetes Awareness Month

IN THE NEWS

Written by Emma Araya, Purdue University Dietetics and Nutrition, Fitness and Health '26

November was Diabetes Awareness Month. Diabetes affects 38.4 million people in the United States. 8.7 million of those 38.4 do not even know they have diabetes.

Diabetes is a disease where the body's ability to make or use insulin is decreased. Insulin is a hormone produced in the pancreas which helps regulate the amount of glucose (sugar) in the blood. The two main types of diabetes are type 1 and type 2. Type 1 diabetes is when blood sugar is too high and the body can't make insulin. In most cases, it is inherited and not due to diet or lifestyle habits. Type 2, which is the most common, is when the body does not respond to insulin as well and too much sugar can stay in the blood. Type 2 diabetes can result from poor quality diets and not enough exercise.

Anyone can develop type 2 diabetes but keeping a healthy lifestyle can help reduce or avoid getting this disease. Registered dietitians and medical doctors are available to help advise in treatment and prevention of diabetes.



Sources: <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/community-health-outreach/national-diabetes-month> <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/health-equity/diabetes-by-the-numbers.html#:~:text=Total%20Diabetes,have%20been%20diagnosed%20with%20diabetes.> <https://www.eatright.org/health/health-conditions/diabetes/how-an-rdn-can-help-with-diabetes> <https://www.diabetes.org.uk/diabetes-the-basics/types-of-diabetes/type-2>