



**NUTRITIONALLY  
SPEAKING**

## What makes a good salad

by George Meinig, D.D.S.

Dear Dr. Meinig: You have in several articles mentioned eating a salad at least once a day. I suspect there are others like me who would like to know what foods you think are good to make up a salad. Is the usual lettuce and tomato good enough? What kind of salad do you eat? G.J.

DEAR G.J.: Those are good questions, because I suspect most people don't go beyond the usual lettuce and tomato. That is better than no salad, as it may be the only raw food being eaten that day, but salads should contain more variety than that.

Within the last two or three years more and more people have begun to take seriously the advice of nutritionists about eating raw vegetables, especially in salads. Restaurants have responded to this change in attitude with the creation of the salad bar. Now even the fast, junk food establishments have them and are finding that they attract customers.

The meat-and-potato man and the child who refused to eat vegetables, now enjoy being able to load their plates to overflowing. Taking as much as they want and returning for seconds, makes them feel it is a bargain. Whatever, many who never touched raw veggies, now are eating a larger assortment of them.

When selecting foods at a salad bar, or for salad preparation at home, it is wise to keep the main objective in mind. Even the worst junk foods supply fuel for our engines -- but it is a very poor quality fuel. These "empty calories" are fattening and contain very few of the 40 or 50 essential nutrients that our cells need to keep us healthy.

A good variety can be chosen for a salad simply by choosing colors -- even though you know very little about proteins, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and enzymes. The "color code" involves six colors, and you need at least one food from each of the six colors: green, red, orange, purple, yellow and white. These colors indicate different kinds of minerals and nutrients, so a good assortment of colors can provide the necessary variety in your salad.

In choosing at the salad bar, or in buying for home use, one usually begins with the leafy greens (lettuce, spinach, cabbage, parsley, beet tops, etc.). Red, orange and purple are provided by beets, red cabbage, carrots, eggplant, pumpkin, sweet potato, tomato. Yellow and white are supplied by corn, cucumber, yellow wax beans, crookneck squash, turnips, avocado. More green is available in green peas, lima beans, string beans, broccoli, celery, green peppers, asparagus, sprouts -- and lots of others. Your best choice among all these "goodies" is always the natural food, eaten raw. Cooking diminishes the nutrient value to some extent, overcooking is worse.

Protein content of a salad can be supplied by adding beans or other legumes, raw sunflower and pumpkin seeds, cheese, salmon, sardines, chicken, crab, shrimp, etc. I'm not strong on leftovers, as so much food value can be lost during storage, and through repeated heating. Cold leftovers of beef, lamb, and chicken are tasty additions to a salad.

Salad bars also feature some things that are not salads at all, and could be called "fast-junk-salads." Cooked macaroni and all pastas, white rice, cooked or canned vegetables, canned fruit mixtures and the like, (often found on salad bars) will add unwanted calories and poor food value. Also leave out the hot breads and biscuits, and go back for seconds of the real salad offerings.

The salad feast my dear wife prepared this noon contained lettuce, carrots, beets, zucchini, broccoli, celery, onion, string beans, turnips and raw sunflower seeds. The salad dressing was oil and cider vinegar. At dinner yesterday evening, we started with a salad of lettuce, tomato, avocado, cucumber, radish, raw peas and yellow crookneck squash, "dressed" with olive oil and fresh lemon juice.

The evening meal should also be color planned for better nutrition. A serving of meat or fish with two white vegetables (e.g., potatoes and turnips), or two yellow ones (as sweet potato and squash), and even two green ones -- is lacking in eye appeal and taste appeal -- and top food value.

To get reluctant family members to eat these foods, do as the salad bar restaurants do -- serve the salad first as a separate course. Hungry people will readily eat a whole salad, lettuce and all, if it is all they have before them. I have been following this plan ever since my early teenage years. My mother had trouble getting my brother and me to eat our salads. We had good appetites, and ate everything else, but always left most of the salad on our plates. One day when my mother was particularly annoyed by our neglect of a good salad, we spoke up, "If you want us to eat that stuff, why don't you feed it to us first?" Well, in our family it has been first ever since -- a delicious and enjoyable first course, much relished -- and good for us!