

Nutrition Action

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HEALTH LETTER®
CENTER FOR SCIENCE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

COVID-19 VACCINES

Our Best Shot

An interview with **Dr. Anthony Fauci**



M E M O

Now, the Hard Work Begins



For Joe Biden, getting elected was the easy part. Rarely has an incoming president faced so many simultaneous crises.

But crisis can mean opportunity. And when it comes to protecting our health, the new administration can do a lot. Here are a few ideas.

First and foremost, we must get the Covid-19 pandemic under control and, by so doing, restore the economy. Roughly 350,000 American lives were lost to Covid in 2020.

Denying science is useless in combating a deadly virus. Relying on science (and scientists) in government, academia, and industry is the only way to end a pandemic that has killed more Americans than World War I and the wars in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq combined.

But controlling the virus is just the start.

With endless lines at food banks, it's high time the U.S. Department of Agriculture—with help from Congress—boosted SNAP benefits and used the program to promote healthier foods. The USDA should also restore rules requiring school meals to have more whole grains and less salt, and set limits on added sugars.

Meanwhile, the Food and Drug Administration needs to do something about the silent pandemic of cardiovascular disease that excess salt causes. The FDA should finalize its draft guidance—issued 4½ years ago—encouraging companies to voluntarily reduce salt in processed and restaurant foods.

There's more.

The new administration should create a

White House Deputy Assistant to the President for Food and Nutrition Policy, and should press Congress to create a National Institute of Nutrition at the National Institutes of Health.

It should also require government buildings—including those that house offices and correctional facilities—to serve healthier foods. And it should close the loophole that allows the food industry to secretly determine which ingredients are “generally recognized as safe.”

Next, it's time to reverse a slew of Trump-era orders, many

dedicated to gumming up the government's efforts to protect the public's health.

Among them:

- An executive order forcing slaughterhouses to stay open during Covid-19 outbreaks.
- A [proposal](#) to cancel Department of Health and Human Services rules that are at

least 10 years old unless they are re-justified (some 2,400 are on the books).

- An executive order requiring agencies to strike two existing rules for every new one they issue.

Finally, the Biden administration must reverse Trump's America First approach and rejoin the World Health Organization as a contributing member. If we learned one thing last year, it's that viruses don't respect borders.

Few of these policy shifts will come easily ...but rest assured that CSPI will be on the front lines fighting for every one of them.

Peter G. Lurie, MD, MPH, President
Center for Science in the Public Interest



First on the USDA's to-do list: boost benefits for SNAP participants.

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Our Best Shot

An interview with Dr. Anthony Fauci



Anthony Fauci has been director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases since 1984. He oversees research on HIV/AIDS,

respiratory infections, diarrheal diseases, tuberculosis, malaria, Zika, and Ebola. He is also chief of the NIAID's Laboratory of Immunoregulation, where his research has helped develop treatments for HIV, polyarteritis nodosa, and granulomatosis with polyangiitis. Fauci was a member of the White House Coronavirus Task Force and has been a voice for strong science throughout the pandemic.

A BREAKTHROUGH

Lurie: Hi, Tony. Thanks so much for doing this. Let's jump right in. How do you feel about the rapid development of these vaccines?

Fauci: Peter, I believe strongly that this is truly a historic scientific accomplishment. To go from the identification of a brand new pathogen in January 2020 to not only having a safe and highly effective vaccine, but one that's already being administered to people, in about 11 months, this is beyond unprecedented. If this were a decade ago, or even five years ago, it would have taken several years at best.

Lurie: Would some people say that the speed was reckless?

Fauci: It has nothing to do with recklessness. It's the application of extraordinary scientific advances, which have allowed us to do things in months that would have otherwise taken years.

In mid-December, when Covid-19 was killing 3,000 Americans a day, the Pfizer vaccine started reaching the arms of healthcare workers (and the Moderna vaccine wasn't far behind). Dr. Anthony Fauci spoke about its safety and effectiveness, and how to combat vaccine hesitancy, with CSPI President Dr. Peter Lurie.

In addition, it's due to an extraordinary investment on the part of the government, to the tune of billions of dollars, to pre-purchase vaccines prior to the time that companies even demonstrated that they're safe and effective, which means that you're taking a financial risk.

If the vaccine works, you've saved many months. If the vaccine doesn't work, you've lost a lot of money. The decision was made: Let's gamble with the money to see if we can save time.

So when people express skepticism or concern about getting vaccinated because they feel it was done too quickly, it is important to explain that speed did not compromise safety or scientific integrity.

ogists, and statisticians who look at the data. And they determined that at a certain point, it was clear that the vaccine was safe and effective.

They then allowed the company to see the data, which the company analyzed, then submitted to the FDA to consider whether to approve the vaccine for an emergency use or for an outright licensure. The career scientists—not political appointees—at the FDA carefully scrutinized the data, and then the Vaccine and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee recommended that the FDA issue an Emergency Use Authorization.

Each of those steps occurred according to the way it should have occurred. And an EUA was granted, and now the vaccine is being distributed.

Lurie: Do you have any concerns about the FDA's approval of the Pfizer vaccine?

Fauci: I was watching it like a hawk, Peter, and I can tell you that it was done in an entirely appropriate manner.

The data from the trials were given to a data and safety monitoring board, which is completely independent of the government, the drug company, and the FDA.

This board is a group of scientists, vaccinologists, immunologists, virol-



Healthcare workers were the first to get Covid vaccines.

Skepticism is understandable, but what happened is a very clear, transparent, and independent process. We need to keep explaining that in a clear, concise way so that people understand.

Lurie: *How was the vaccines' effectiveness determined?*

Fauci: By state-of-the-art, gold standard, randomized placebo-controlled trials. With the Pfizer vaccine, the trial included 44,000 people. With the Moderna vaccine, it was 30,000 people.

And at the end of the trials, it was shown that when you compare the number of clinically recognizable infections in the placebo versus the vaccine group, the vaccines were 94 to 95 percent effective, which in the world of vaccines is about as good as it gets.

Lurie: *Did effectiveness vary by age, sex, race, or any other criteria?*

Fauci: We monitor this carefully. About a third of the subjects in the Pfizer trial were aged 18 to 65 and healthy, a third were aged 18 to 65 with underlying conditions, and a third were older than 65.

And when you look at the data, it looks like the vaccine was effective across all of the groups—elderly, younger, and those with or without underlying conditions like obesity, hypertension, and diabetes, although you didn't have enough people to do statistical tests on each of those groups.

What we don't know until we give the vaccine to millions of people is how effective it's going to be, for example, in people

who are immunosuppressed, on cancer chemotherapy, or on other treatments that modify the immune system.



Fauci on the coronavirus vaccine approval process: "I was watching it like a hawk."

SAFETY

Lurie: *What side effects have you seen?*

Fauci: Let's divide them into two buckets: what we call reactogenicity, which is what you get within 24 hours, sometimes within a couple of hours, and then the serious adverse events that could occur after weeks or beyond.

The Pfizer vaccine had reactogenicity that you might expect of a vaccine that elicits a strong immune response: pain in the arm, some swelling, some muscle aches, some fatigue, sometimes fever. They last generally between 24 and 36 hours, and they're alleviated very nicely by something like Tylenol. We saw a significant amount of those reactions, which was not unexpected.

There were no serious adverse events that were red flags when the vaccine was rolled out in the UK in early December.

Lurie: *Those reactions can be life-threatening because they can make you unable to breathe?*

Fauci: Yes. Both had a significant history of severe allergic reactions. So Pfizer said, if you have a history of anaphylactic reactions to the ingredients in the vaccine, definitely don't get vaccinated.

And if you have a history of anaphylactic reactions to anything else, get vaccinated in the presence of someone or a facility that can handle a reaction.

If you have contact dermatitis or get mild allergic reactions to food or something else, you need not be concerned.

In the Pfizer trial, there were also a few cases of Bell's palsy in the vaccine group. That's a usually temporary weakness or paralysis of muscles in the face. However, the incidence was no greater than what you would see in the general population, regardless of vaccination. So the statisticians feel that Bell's palsy is not associated with the vaccine.

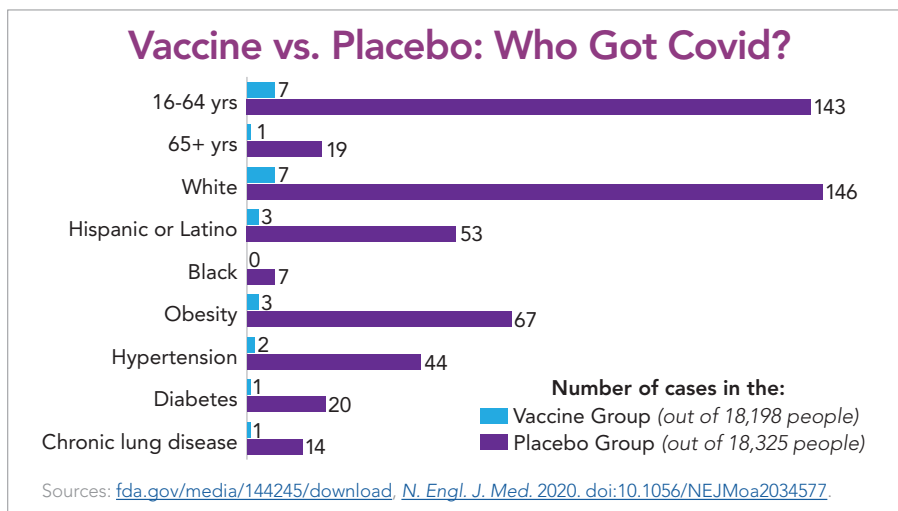
The bottom line is that, apart from a couple of allergic reactions in people who had a strong history of allergic reactions, the safety profile looks very good.

Lurie: *Could other adverse effects show up later?*

Fauci: There is the possibility that you might have a serious consequence of the vaccine that you didn't see in the first few weeks.

However, the FDA has looked at all of the adverse events that were reported in essentially all the vaccines they've ever approved. And they found that

well over 90-plus percent occur within the first 30- to 40-odd days after the vaccination.



In the Pfizer trial, the vaccine cut illness from Covid regardless of age, race, or risk factors.

However, two individuals there did have serious allergic reactions—ana-phylactic-like reactions.

That's why Pfizer had to wait 60 days from the time that half of the people received their last dose of the vaccine before it applied for an EUA. Historically, that should cover more than 90-plus percent of any adverse events that might occur. So even though there's one-year and two-year follow-up on this trial, you've already passed this 60-day period when most adverse events would be expected to appear.

Lurie: *What might those long-term effects be?*

Fauci: They're mostly neurological—like a Guillain-Barré type syndrome, transverse myelitis, Bell's palsy. It's very, very rare that they occur that far out. But we've got to be alert that they are possible even though they're extremely rare events.

RELUCTANCE

Lurie: *Why are some people afraid of the vaccine?*

Fauci: It's complicated. Some people are anti-vaxxers, and no matter what you tell them, they do not want to be pressured into getting a vaccine, because it's an affront to their own personal decision making. They don't want it, period.

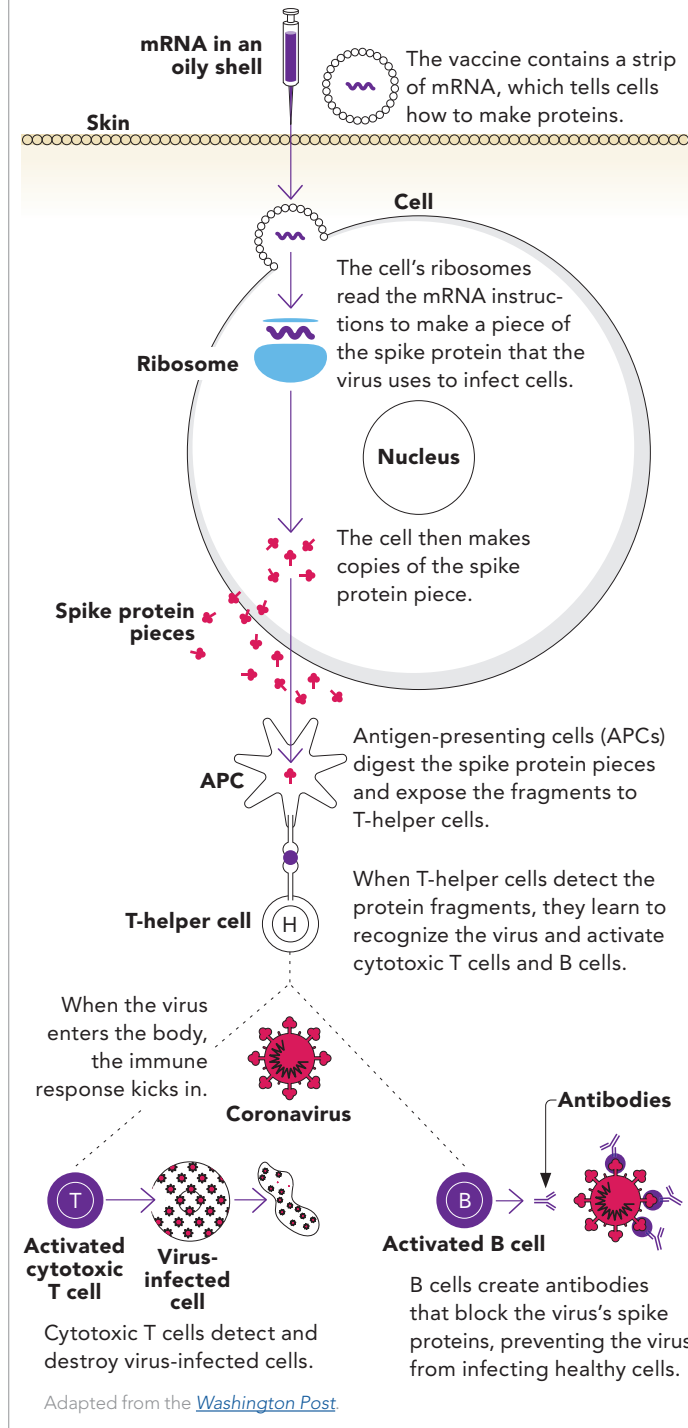
But a far greater proportion of people might be hesitant or reluctant based on false information that they received, usually through social media.

We saw that very clearly with people reluctant to take measles vaccines because of the misinformation that it's associated with autism, which is clearly not the case.

And once you show people the data, more often than not, you get them to reconsider. So you really need to be transparent with people to try to debunk the inaccurate information that they may have heard.

It's a task. We've got to put the effort in to explain to people that in the history

How the Covid mRNA Vaccines Work



of preventive medicine, vaccines are overwhelmingly safe, and the benefits far outweigh the risks.

Lurie: *Can you speak to concerns in the African-American community?*

Fauci: Yes. There's a mistrust on the part of the African-American community for any medical intervention, particularly

one that's being pushed by the government, which we are doing now because it's our responsibility to end this outbreak.

When you look at the history of the relationship between the African-American population and the government's health programs, the first thing that comes to mind is the disgraceful Tuskegee Study decades ago, where African-American men with syphilis were allowed to go untreated just to watch the progression of the pathogenesis of the infection.

That is terrible and should never have happened, and hopefully will never happen again, given the safety guidelines that we now have about clinical research.

But that's something that sticks in the minds of people. So we've got to convince them that what we're doing is for their own individual health, their family's health, and, importantly, the health of society.

Lurie: *What would you say to a family member of yours who is reluctant to take the vaccine?*

Fauci: First of all, I wouldn't denigrate them or make it like they don't know what they're talking about, because that's the easiest way to shut somebody out.

Then I would try to get a feel for why they are reluctant. And then I'd go step by step, explaining why that concern might be understandable, but not justifiable.

Lurie: *How does a decision to not get vaccinated affect others?*

Fauci: It has profound implications, especially when you are dealing with a respiratory-borne illness like this one, where you don't have any control over exposure or infectivity.

Myths & Misinformation



Covid vaccines cause infertility and alter your DNA. Those were two myths making the rounds in December.

■ **Infertility.** “Vaccine is female sterilization,” claimed the Facebook post, which the social media site labeled as “false information.” According to the post, the Pfizer vaccine contains a spike protein that trains the body to attack syncytin-1, a protein in the placenta.

Syncytin-1 is “completely unrelated to the SARS spike protein,” says Ian Jones, professor of virology at the UK’s University of Reading. The notion of infertility is “therefore essentially fictitious.”

Anti-vaccine activists have also falsely claimed that vaccines for polio, hepatitis B, and HPV (human papillomavirus) cause infertility.

■ **Altered DNA.** The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines use mRNA (messenger RNA) to teach the immune system to attack the coronavirus. Although mRNA is similar to DNA, the vaccines can’t change your DNA. Like the mRNA your cells make, the vaccine’s mRNA is destroyed by the cells’ enzymes after it has done its job.

—Bonnie Liebman

If enough people decide they don’t want to get vaccinated, we’ll never reach that protective umbrella of herd immunity, and this infection will always be a threat in society.

That’s why what someone else does might affect you, particularly if you’re a vulnerable person and you may not have a good immune response. You may need the protective umbrella of herd immunity to protect you.

Lurie: So we’re stronger together if we act together?

Fauci: No doubt.

Lurie: Do people who get vaccinated still need to wear a mask?

Fauci: Yes, they will, until the overwhelming majority of the population is vaccinated and there’s no virus circulating in society.

When you get some of the population vaccinated, but not as much as you need, and the level of infection goes way down, you don’t have to worry as much as we do now. You don’t have to avoid restaurants and theaters, for example.

But as long as there’s some infection in the community, you have to have some degree of wearing masks, avoiding crowds, avoiding getting close to people.

Lurie: Is that because people who get the vaccine could still infect others?

Fauci: Yes. The trials determined that the vaccines are 95 percent effective at preventing symptomatic disease. But they didn’t look at protecting against asymptomatic infection.

It’s possible that you could be protected against symptomatic disease but still have enough virus in your nose and throat to replicate. Hence, by definition, you are infected, and you might be able to infect others.

But you could also be infected but not have enough virus in your nose and throat to transmit it to anyone.

What’s more, we don’t know how long immunity will last.

Until we know the answers to those questions from other trials, even people who get the vaccines should wear masks and keep a distance from others.

Lurie: Will we ever go back to normal?

Fauci: I would like to say that we will have such good collective memory that we’ll be really careful about respiratory-borne illnesses, particularly in the winter. That is, people will avoid crowded places and might feel comfortable wearing a mask, as so many people in Asian countries do all winter. They do it as a courtesy, not to infect someone else, as well as to protect themselves.

Quite frankly, given my experience with how you forget things after they’re behind you, I think the everyday man and woman on the street probably will go back to the way things were before, with a little more attention to the fact that we could have another outbreak.

Lurie: Masks and distancing have an upside. I haven’t had a cold all year.

Fauci: You are like many people. I had the same experience. I always get two or three mild colds in the winter, and occasionally I might even get influenza, but I haven’t had a sniffle since last January.

In fact, that’s why we’re likely to have a mild flu season here. It’s already happened in Australia. Their winter ended in August, and they had the mildest flu season in recorded history.

And the reason is that people were doing things to prevent Covid-19. They were wearing masks and avoiding crowded situations, congregate settings, keeping a distance. And sure enough, the level of influenza almost disappeared.

Lurie: Thanks again for taking the time to talk to our readers, Tony.

Fauci: Take care, Peter. 🍌

This interview was condensed and edited for clarity.

For More Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19)

For the ingredients in the vaccines:

Pfizer: [cvdvaccine.com](https://www.cvdvaccine.com)

Moderna: [modernatx.com/covid19vaccine-eu](https://www.modernatx.com/covid19vaccine-eu)

Quick Studies

A snapshot of the latest research on diet, exercise, and more.

Keeping Diabetes at Bay



What's the best way to keep prediabetes from becoming type 2 diabetes?

Scientists (partly funded by the food industry) had 2,223 people with prediabetes lose at least 8 percent of their initial weight with a very-low-calorie diet for eight weeks, then randomly assigned them to one of two diets:

- high protein, low glycemic index (GI), or
- moderate protein, moderate GI.

(Carbohydrates with a low GI lead to a smaller spike in blood sugar.)

After three years, only 3 percent of the people in each group had been diagnosed

with diabetes. The only difference: blood sugar levels in those on the high-protein, low-GI diet were *less likely* to drop to the normal range.

What to do: To stave off diabetes, lose excess weight (see Dec. 2019, p. 3).

[Diabetes Obes. Metab. 2020. doi:10.1111/dom.14219.](https://doi.org/10.1111/dom.14219)

The Eyes Don't Need It

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a leading cause of vision loss in U.S. adults.

Researchers randomly assigned roughly 25,000 adults to take vitamin D (2,000 IU), fish oil (1,000 milligrams), both, or a placebo every day for five years. The supplements had no impact on whether AMD occurred or got worse.

What to do: Don't rely on vitamin D or fish oil to protect your eyes.

[JAMA Ophthalmol. 2020. doi:10.1001/jamaophthalmol.2020.4409.](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamaophthalmol.2020.4409)



THC Behind the Wheel



THC—the intoxicating component of marijuana—impairs driving. Does CBD (the non-intoxicating component) counteract THC's psychoactive effects, as some claim?

Scientists had 26 young adults vape (in-hale) THC, CBD, THC+CBD, or a placebo on different days. Each dose of THC or CBD was 13.75 milligrams. After 40 to 100 minutes, and again after four to five hours, the volunteers drove for an hour at 60 mph. (Relax. The car had a second set of pedals for the research team.)

Compared to the placebo, lane weaving, swerving, and overcorrection during the first drive were worse after both the THC and the THC+CBD, but not after just the CBD. No differences were seen after four or five hours.

What to do: Don't expect CBD to make THC safe for driving. And the THC in edibles—like gummies or brownies—takes longer to wear off than inhaled THC, because it takes longer to reach the bloodstream (see Mar. 2019, p. 9).

[JAMA 324: 2163, 2177, 2020.](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2020.2163)

A Mediterranean Diet & ED

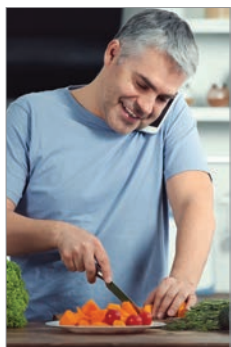
Can a Mediterranean diet help prevent erectile dysfunction (ED)?

Researchers tracked 21,469 men aged 40 to 75 for 11 years. They calculated Mediterranean diet "scores" by adding points for vegetables, beans, fruits, nuts, grains, fish, and polyunsaturated rather than saturated fats, and by subtracting points for red meat and dairy.

Compared to men with a low Mediterranean diet score, those with a high score had a 22 percent lower risk of ED if they were under age 60 and an 18 percent lower risk if they were 60 to 69. For men aged 70 or older, the difference in ED risk wasn't quite statistically significant.

What to do: This kind of study can't prove that a Mediterranean diet prevents ED, but that (or a similar) diet is worth eating to protect all of your blood vessels. 🍷

[JAMA Netw. Open 2020. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.21701.](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.21701)





Cold Comfort

BY CAITLIN DOW

If every tickle in your throat, slight headache, or mild cough sets off alarm bells these days, you're not alone. It can be tricky to tell the difference between a cold, the flu, and Covid-19.

Some clues: A cold is likely to cause mild symptoms like a runny nose, sore throat, or cough. If you have body aches and a fever that came on quickly, you may have the flu.

Covid-19 can be harder to pin down. Fever, cough, headache, shortness of breath, and an inability to taste or smell are among the symptoms, but some people who are infected have none of those.

Not sure if you should get tested or call your doctor? Try googling "[CDC coronavirus self-checker](#)" for help.

The good news: Simple precautions that can curb the spread of Covid-19—like wearing a mask, social distancing, and frequent hand washing—can also lower your risk of catching a cold or the flu. Just don't put much stock in "immune boosting" claims about foods or supplements (see June 2020, p. 3 and Dec. 2019, p. 8).

Can anything soothe symptoms or shorten your illness? Here's what we know.

Vitamin D

Claim: "Vitamin D can help reduce Covid-19 risks," declared [Healthline.com](#) in September.

Evidence: An analysis of 25 randomized trials on roughly 11,000 people reported about a 20 percent lower risk of colds and flu in those who took vitamin D daily or weekly (see June 2020, p. 3).¹ The researchers calculated that 20 people would have to take vitamin D to prevent one cold or flu infection.

Vitamin D had the biggest impact in people with deficient blood levels (below 10 nanograms per milliliter).

But those studies looked at colds and the flu, not Covid-19.

Some studies have reported a link between low vitamin D and the risk of getting Covid-19. For example, among 489 people, those whose levels were inadequate (below 20 ng/mL) were 77 percent more likely than people with normal levels to test positive for Covid.²



That kind of study can't prove that vitamin D protects against Covid-19. Something else about people with low vitamin D could explain their higher risk.

"We need well-designed trials to determine whether vitamin D supplements are effective for preventing or treating Covid-19," says JoAnn Manson, chief of preventive medicine at the Harvard-affiliated Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

Fortunately, dozens of trials—including one by Manson—are looking at whether vitamin D can lower the risk of getting Covid or its severe outcomes.

Bottom Line: Until we know more, "everyone should avoid being vitamin D deficient," says Manson. Since few foods are rich in D, take a multivitamin or vitamin D supplement with roughly the RDA (600 IU a day up to age 70 and 800 IU over 70).

¹ *BMJ* 2017. doi:10.1136/bmj.i6583.

² *JAMA Netw. Open* 3: e2019722, 2020.

Over-the-Counter Drugs

Claim: “With Mucinex All in One, you’ve got unbeatable relief from your worst cold and flu symptoms,” says the [TV ad](#).

Evidence: If you don’t need a fever and pain reducer *and* a cough suppressant *and* an expectorant *and* a nasal decongestant, you’re exposing yourself to drugs—and side effects—you may not need if you take a combination cold-and-flu formula like Mucinex All in One.

Cough suppressants and expectorants (which thin mucus and make it easier to cough) can cause dizziness. Decongestants can raise blood pressure and may cause restlessness and insomnia. Fever and pain reducing non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil), naproxen (Aleve), and aspirin can increase the risk of stomach ulcers over the long term.

Then there’s acetaminophen (Tylenol). Taking more than 3,000 milligrams a day over the long term can damage your liver. And acetaminophen is in so many cough, cold, allergy,



pain, and sleep medications that it’s easy to end up taking more than you realize.

One bit of good news: If you’re steering clear of ibuprofen because of news reports last March warning that it can worsen Covid-19, relax.

Those warnings spread when a letter to a medical journal suggested that ibuprofen *may* increase the number of receptors that the virus binds to on cells.¹

Since then, studies have reported no worse outcomes in Covid patients who take ibuprofen.² And the World Health Organization quickly retracted its initial warning about using the drug for Covid symptoms.³

Bottom Line: Take cold and flu medicines when you need them, but don’t overdo it. And don’t give them to children under the age of six.

¹ [Lancet Respir. Med. 2020. doi:10.1016/S2213-2600\(20\)30116-8.](#)

² [Clin. Transl. Sci. 2020. doi:10.1111/cts.12904.](#)

³ [twitter.com/who/status/1240409217997189128.](#)

Honey



Claim: “Powered by the best of nature to help relieve your cough,” says the Robitussin ad featuring its new line of Naturals Cough Relief syrups made with honey and ivy leaf.

Evidence: In the largest study (partly funded by the honey industry), Israeli researchers randomly assigned 270 children with a cough due to a respiratory infection like a cold or the flu to swallow half a tablespoon of one of three kinds of honey or a

placebo 30 minutes before bed.

Symptoms like cough frequency and severity and sleep quality improved by about half in all three groups of honey takers versus by about a third in the placebo takers.¹

No good studies have tested honey in adults.

Bottom Line: The evidence that honey can relieve a cough due to a cold or the flu is pretty thin. And honey has a downside: Each tablespoon has 17 grams of sugar. That’s a third of the Daily Value for added sugar.

¹ [Pediatrics 130: 465, 2012.](#)

Chicken Soup

Claim: “Studies show [chicken soup] clears nasal passages and congestion better than other hot liquids,” reported [WebMD](#) in June.

Evidence: Only one study has looked. Fifteen healthy adults without a cold or the flu drank chicken soup, hot or cold water, or nothing on separate days. Five minutes after they *sipped* the chicken soup or hot—but not cold—water, their nasal mucus moved more quickly than when they drank nothing. But when they used a *straw*, only the soup sped up mucus.¹

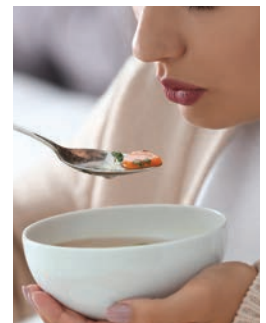
One tiny study, on people without a cold or the flu who knew what they were drinking, is pretty weak evidence.

Ditto for an oft-cited study in which chicken soup slowed the movement of neutrophils *in test tubes*.² (Neutrophils are immune cells that cause inflammation when you’re fighting a respiratory infection.) So what? Chicken soup is digested long before it reaches your immune cells.

Bottom Line: Studies have never tested chicken soup on people with colds. But *any* hot liquid (including chicken soup) may help clear nasal passages.

¹ [Chest 74: 408, 1978.](#)

² [Chest 118: 1150, 2000.](#)



Echinacea & Elderberry

Claim: “Fast-acting formula for supporting immune response at onset,” says gaiaherbs.com about its Quick Defense, a supplement made with echinacea and elderberry.

Evidence: In the largest and best study on echinacea (co-authored by an employee of an echinacea maker), researchers randomly assigned 359 people to take echinacea or a placebo at the first sign of cold symptoms. The echinacea takers took 10,200 milligrams the first day and 5,100 mg a day for the next four days.¹

Their colds were no shorter, and their symptoms were no milder, than those of the placebo takers.

In the best elderberry study, researchers offered the antiviral drug Tamiflu to 85 adults



and children at the first signs of flu symptoms. (Tamiflu and other antiviral flu drugs can shorten the length of a flu by about a day, though most cases only last about a week.)

The researchers randomly assigned the volunteers to swallow either one tablespoon of the elderberry syrup Sambucol or a placebo four times a day for five days.² (Children took just one tablespoon twice a day.)

Flu symptoms lasted just as long whether people took Sambucol or the placebo.

Bottom Line: Don't expect much relief from echinacea or elderberry supplements.

¹ *Ann. Intern. Med.* 153: 769, 2010.

² *J. Gen. Intern. Med.* 2020. doi:10.1007/s11606-020-06170-w.

Dairy



Claim: “Milk is another food to stay away from when you're feeling under the weather,” said the Eat This, Not That website in October, in an article about foods to avoid when you have a cold or the flu. “Dairy can temporarily thicken mucus.”

Evidence: In the only study to look at dairy in people with a cold, researchers infected 51 Australian adults with a cold virus, then asked them to keep track of how much dairy they ate or drank. (The study was partly funded by the dairy industry.)

Over the next 10 days, dairy intake wasn't linked to “nasal secretion weights” (the scientists weighed the participants' used tissues) or symptoms like cough, congestion, or runny nose.¹

Other studies didn't even look at people with colds.

In one (it was industry funded), researchers randomly assigned 125 Australian adults without a cold to drink 10 oz. of flavored cow's milk or soy milk. *Both* groups reported that their saliva felt thicker and that they felt a coating in their mouths and throats.² Could some people mistake that “coating” for mucus?

And in another, researchers randomly assigned 108 British adults who reported high levels of mucus (but had no cold) to drink 12 oz. of flavored cow's milk or soy milk for four days. The soy milk drinkers reported about a 10-point drop (on a 100-point scale) in mucus secretion, while the cow's milk drinkers reported about a 2-point drop.³ Not exactly a home run.

Bottom Line: Cold or no cold, there's no strong evidence that dairy means more mucus.

¹ *Am. Rev. Respir. Dis.* 141: 352, 1990.

² *Appetite* 20: 61, 1993.

³ *Laryngoscope* 129: 13, 2019.

Neti Pots



Claim: “If you feel like your allergies, sinus, and upper respiratory problems are escalating, it might be time to try a nasal irrigation device, such as a neti pot,” said EverydayHealth.com in 2018.

Evidence: In several studies in people with allergies or chronic sinus inflammation, rinsing out the nose with saline (using a nasal spray, neti pot, syringe, or other nasal irrigator) one to four times a day eased congestion by clearing out thick mucus and debris like dust and pollen.^{1,2} But most of the studies were small and not double-blind.

No good studies have tested whether a saline rinse can ease congestion in people with a cold or the flu.

If you decide to try a neti pot, make your saline solution only using store-bought *distilled* (not spring) water or tap water that's been boiled for at least three minutes and then cooled.

Tap water that hasn't been boiled can be contaminated with an amoeba that can pass through the nasal passage to the brain and cause a rare, but deadly, infection. (*Drinking* tap water is safe. You can only get the infection through your nose.)

Bottom Line: There's no good research showing that irrigating your nose with salt water will help ease congestion if you have a cold or the flu. 🍷

¹ *Cochrane Database Syst. Rev.* 6: CD012597, 2018.

² *Otolaryngol. Head Neck Surg.* 2015. doi:10.1177/0194599815572097.

The Healthy Cook

Winner, Winner...



To keep things interesting, try this classic Moroccan chicken dish with curry powder or ras el hanout instead of paprika and coriander. Bulgur tabouli (see back cover) makes a great pairing. 🍴

Chicken Tagine

SERVES 4

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Tbs. + 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil | 3 carrots, chopped |
| 1½ lbs. bone-in, skinless chicken thighs or breasts | ½ lb. small zucchini, chopped |
| 1 large onion, chopped | 2 cups chicken or vegetable stock (homemade is best) |
| 3 cloves garlic, minced | 1 Tbs. lemon zest |
| 1 Tbs. grated ginger | 2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice |
| 2 Tbs. tomato paste | ½ tsp. kosher salt |
| 1 tsp. paprika | freshly ground black pepper, to taste |
| ½ tsp. coriander | |

1. In a large heavy pot, heat 1 Tbs. oil over medium heat until shimmering. Sauté the chicken until browned, 2–3 minutes per side. Remove from the pot.
2. Add the remaining 2 Tbs. oil. Sauté the onion until lightly browned, 3–5 minutes. Stir in the garlic, ginger, tomato paste, and spices. Cook, stirring, for 1 minute.
3. Add the carrots, zucchini, stock, and lemon zest. Bring to a boil over high heat.
4. Reduce the heat to low. Return the chicken with any juices to the pot. Cover and gently braise until the chicken is fully cooked, 20–30 minutes.
5. Season with the lemon juice, salt, and pepper.

PER SERVING (2 cups): calories 340 | total fat 17 g | sat fat 3 g | carbs 14 g | fiber 3 g | total sugar 6 g | added sugar 0 g | protein 35 g | sodium 460 mg



Photo: Kate Sherwood/CSPINet

For more recipes

Go to nutritionaction.com/tagine for **Vegetarian Chickpea Tagine** and **Chicken or Vegetable Stock**.

Cooking questions?

Write to Chef Kate at healthycook@cspinet.org

HOLD THE BOOZE

The latest non-alcoholic libations

BY LINDSAY MOYER

Cutting calories? Taking the “Dry January” challenge? Signing up for designated driver? These “drinks” are less than 0.5 percent alcohol, according to labeling rules.

Heads up: Some cost as much as the real thing. And some may be easier to find online. (Check **TO BUY** for the details.)

Hopped Up

HopTea calls itself “tea brewed like craft beer” ...and means it. The calorie-free sparkling tea is infused with hops like Citra or Mosaic. Those are the flowers that give IPAs their citrusy bitter notes. But a 16 oz. IPA can set you back 250 calories. Not a tea drinker? Try **H2OPS Sparkling Hop Water**.

TO BUY: HopTea: \$35 for a 12-pack (hoptea.com). H2OPS: \$9 for a 4-pack (h2ops.com). Some Whole Foods carry single bottles or cans.



Just a Splash

Traditional bubbly drinks are sweet. A cup of Martinelli’s Sparkling Cider, for example, has 140 calories and 7½ teaspoons of juice sugars. But sparkling **Spindrift** sticks to a splash of “real squeezed fruit,” so a 12 oz. **Blackberry**, **Cranberry Raspberry**, or other refreshing flavor has no more than 20 calories. (Of course, you can always do it yourself with a cup of seltzer plus an ounce of fresh-squeezed fruit juice.)

TO BUY: \$6 for an 8-pack.



Zero Proof

Seedlip is a “distilled non-alcoholic spirit.” Two ounces of the **Garden 108** (herbal), **Grove 42** (citrus), or **Spice 94** (aromatic and spicy) have zero calories.

They’re subtle, though. Add more than a splash of seltzer or tonic, and the flavor starts to fade.

For low-cal knockoffs of rum, gin, etc., try **Lyre’s**. (To dodge food dyes, skip the Absinthe, Italian Orange, and Italian Spritz flavors.)

TO BUY: Lyre’s: \$36 for a 24 oz. bottle (lyres.com). Seedlip: \$32 for a 24 oz. bottle (seedlipdrinks.com).



Cheers!

Athletic Brewing caters to enthusiasts who long for the taste of craft suds, but sans alcohol. A 12 oz. can of its **Upside Dawn** has lots of hoppy flavor, yet only 50 calories (from carbs). That’s better than the 60 to 90 calories in most other non-alcoholic beers, and *way* better than the 150 in, say, a 12 oz. Bud.

Craving a Bud Light? New **Budweiser Zero** nails it, yet still manages to shave the calories from 110 to 50.

TO BUY: Budweiser Zero: \$12 for a 12-pack.

Athletic: \$13 for a 6-pack (athleticbrewing.com).



Teatotaler

Unlike many mocktails, **Spirity Cocktails** doesn’t overpower its “spirits distilled from tea” with sugar. The **Mindful Negroni**—with just 30 calories and 1½ tsp. of added sugar—came closest to its name-sake. Who needs Campari?

To save a few bucks, skip Spirity’s **Mindful Mule** and add a squeeze of lime to a **Fever-Tree Refreshingly Light Ginger Beer**, for just 40 calories (see “Mix it Up”).

TO BUY: \$15 for a 4-pack (amazon.com).



Mix it Up

Whether your spirits are zero proof or 80 proof, skip the sugary mixers.

A typical tonic water like Canada Dry has nearly as much sugar as Coke. But **Fever-Tree** slashes the sugar in its **Refreshingly Light** line by simply adding less.

For example, a 7 oz. light **Indian Tonic Water** has just 6 grams (1½ tsp.) of added sugar and 30 calories—without the saccharin or aspartame that’s in many brands of diet tonic. Sweet!

TO BUY: \$5 for a 4-pack. 🍷



THINK FAST!

Healthy shortcuts to make vegetables a snap

BY KATE SHERWOOD & LINDSAY MOYER

Thanks to Covid-19, we're doing more eating—and likely more cooking—at home. Need a break from peeling, chopping, shredding, and slicing?

Here are 10 healthy vegetable shortcuts that save you time in the kitchen, plus 20 simple-yet-scrumptious recipes for salads and sides that get an assist from them. Each recipe makes four servings.

Of course, if you've got the time or inclination, you could always start from scratch and still follow the recipes (and maybe save a little plastic packaging in the process). Either way, enjoy!

Recipes by Kate Sherwood. Product information compiled by Kaamilah Mitchell.



BROCCOLINI

Why it's a shortcut

This cross between regular and Chinese broccoli is tender from floret to tip. That means you don't need to trim the stalks. No broccolini? Use a bag of broccoli florets.

Broccolini with Garlic Sauce

Steam 2 bunches whole broccolini (about 1 lb.) until bright green, 3–5 minutes. Whisk together 1 Tbs. balsamic vinegar, 1 Tbs. reduced-sodium soy sauce, 1 tsp. brown sugar, 1 clove minced garlic, ½ tsp. cornstarch, and ¼ cup water.

Add the mixture to a pan and cook over medium-high heat, stirring until it cooks down to a syrup, 1–2 minutes.

Spoon over the broccolini.

Broccolini with Lemon Parmesan Sauce

Sauté 3 cloves minced garlic in 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil until lightly browned, about 1 minute. Add 2 bunches chopped broccolini (about 1 lb.) and ¼ cup water. Steam until all the water has evaporated and the broccolini is tender, about 2 minutes. Whisk together 1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice, 1 Tbs. mayo, 3 Tbs. grated parmesan, and freshly ground black pepper, to taste. Drizzle over the broccolini.



RICED CAULIFLOWER

Why it's a shortcut

Going from a head of fresh cauliflower to a pile of “crumbles” or “rice” means chopping, then blitzing the florets and stems in a food processor. But you can open and sauté a refrigerated bag of cauli-rice in minutes. (Frozen riced cauliflower has a softer texture. Save it for making mashed cauliflower.)

Cauliflower Pilaf

Sauté 1 diced onion in 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil until lightly browned, 5–7 minutes. Stir in ¼ tsp. paprika, ¼ cup water, 2 Tbs. raisins, and a 12 or 14 oz. bag riced cauliflower (about 3 cups). Cover and cook until tender, 2–3 minutes. Stir in ¼ cup toasted almonds and ¼ tsp. kosher salt.

Parmesan Roasted Cauliflower

Toss a 12 or 14 oz. bag riced cauliflower (about 3 cups) with 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, a pinch dried thyme, ½ tsp. kosher salt, and ¼ cup grated parmesan. Spread out on a baking sheet and roast in a 400°F oven until lightly browned, 10–15 minutes. Sprinkle on salads or mix with brown rice, quinoa, bulgur, or another whole grain.



MATCHSTICK-CUT CARROTS

Why they're a shortcut

Using “matchstick”—aka grated—carrots means no need to slice or shred your own. Another shortcut: For the second recipe, look for pre-cooked refrigerated lentils (like Trader Joe’s or Melissa’s).

Carrot & Fresh Herb Salad

Whisk together 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, 2 Tbs. red wine vinegar, ¼ tsp. kosher salt, and a pinch of paprika. Toss with a 10 oz. bag matchstick carrots (about 2½ cups), 1 minced scallion, and ½ cup chopped fresh soft herbs (mint, parsley, and/or cilantro).

Lemon-Mustard Carrots & Lentils

Whisk together 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, 2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice, 2 Tbs. whole-grain mustard, 1 Tbs. minced capers, ½ tsp. honey, and ¼ tsp. kosher salt. Toss with a 10 oz. bag matchstick carrots (about 2½ cups) and 2 cups cooked lentils.



BROCCOLI SLAW

Why it's a shortcut

These crunchy broccoli stems show up ready for slaw, so you don't have to grate them (or waste them). Carrots and red cabbage add coleslaw's signature color and crunch.

Broccoli Apple Slaw

Whisk together ¼ cup mayo, 1 Tbs. white balsamic vinegar, 1 tsp. dijon mustard, and ¼ tsp. kosher salt. Toss with 1 grated apple and a 12 oz. bag broccoli slaw (about 4 cups).

Broccoli Slaw Fried Rice

Stir-fry a 12 oz. bag broccoli slaw (about 4 cups) in 2 Tbs. peanut oil until hot, 2–3 minutes. Add 2 cups cold, cooked brown rice and stir-fry until hot, about 1 minute. Season with 2 Tbs. reduced-sodium soy sauce and 1 tsp. toasted sesame oil.



NAPA CABBAGE

Why it's a shortcut

Compared to shredding a dense, wobbly head of standard green or red cabbage, delicate napa is a breeze. Halve lengthwise, then slice each half into thin ribbons crosswise. Another shortcut: Try both recipes with bagged shredded red or green cabbage or coleslaw mix instead of napa.

Singapore-Style Cabbage

Stir-fry 1 sliced onion in 1 Tbs. peanut oil until browned, 5–7 minutes. Stir in 1 Tbs. reduced-sodium soy sauce, ½ tsp. curry powder, and ¼ tsp. brown sugar. Add 6 cups shredded cabbage and stir-fry until hot, 1–2 minutes.

Sesame Peanut Noodles

Whisk together ¼ cup peanut butter, 2 Tbs. reduced-sodium soy sauce, 1 tsp. balsamic vinegar, 1 tsp. grated ginger, and 1 tsp. toasted sesame oil. Toss with 2 cups cooked whole wheat spaghetti and 2 cups shredded cabbage.



COOKED BEETS

Why they're a shortcut

Who doesn't love beets! But not everyone loves cooking and peeling them. Companies like Love Beets and Melissa's turn the root veggie into fast food. Plus, an unopened vacuum pack of cooked beets lasts for months in the fridge.

Beet & Goat Cheese Salad

Chop an 8 oz. package cooked beets (about 1½ cups). Whisk together 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, 1 Tbs. white balsamic vinegar, ¼ tsp. kosher salt, and freshly ground black pepper, to taste. Toss with the beets and 4 cups baby spinach or arugula. Top with ¼ cup each walnuts and goat cheese.

Beets & Quinoa

Dice an 8 oz. package cooked beets (about 1½ cups). Whisk together 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, 1 Tbs. red wine vinegar, 1 tsp. whole-grain mustard, ¼ tsp. honey, and ½ tsp. kosher salt. Toss with 2 cups cooked quinoa. Top with the beets and ¼ cup roasted, salted sunflower seeds.

Photos (clockwise from top left): Botthouse Farms, asmodian/stock.adobe.com, Love Beets, Mann's.

To see nutrition info for all the recipes, go to nutritionaction.com/shortcuts



FROZEN ARTICHOKE HEARTS

Why they're a shortcut

When's the last time you steamed a fresh artichoke? We thought so. Frozen hearts to the rescue. Just defrost in the microwave or thaw overnight in the fridge. And with frozen, you dodge the added sodium in canned 'chokes. Nice!

Roasted Artichokes

Thaw and pat dry a 12 oz. bag artichoke hearts (about 2 cups). Toss with 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil and ¼ tsp. kosher salt. Roast in a 425°F oven until browned, 20–25 minutes. Sprinkle with ¼ cup grated parmesan and freshly ground black pepper, to taste.

Artichoke Sauté

Thaw and pat dry a 12 oz. bag artichoke hearts (about 2 cups). Sauté in 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil until browned, 3–5 minutes. Season with the zest and juice of half a lemon and ¼ tsp. kosher salt.



CUBED BUTTERNUT SQUASH

Why it's a shortcut

Halving and peeling a hefty butternut squash takes a sharp knife...and nerves of steel. So we'll often grab a container of squash cubes from the refrigerator case. Making a puréed soup? Try starting with frozen butternut squash.

Butternut Squash with Tahini Sauce

Steam or roast a 20 oz. package cubed butternut squash (about 5 cups). Whisk together 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, 1 Tbs. tahini, 1 tsp. red wine vinegar, ¼ tsp. smoked paprika, ¼ tsp. cumin or coriander, and ¼ tsp. kosher salt. Spoon over the squash.

Roasted Butternut Squash, Apple, & Onion

Toss 3 cups cubed butternut squash with 1 chopped apple, 1 small chopped onion, 3 sprigs thyme, 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, and ¼ tsp. kosher salt. Roast in a 450°F oven until tender and lightly browned, 30–35 minutes.



BAGGED BABY GREENS

Why they're a shortcut

You don't need to de-stem pre-washed baby greens like arugula, spinach, or kale. And you can toss any leftovers into your next sauté. Tip: Don't re-wash them. You risk contaminating the greens with bugs from your sink.

Greens with Orange & Avocado Salad

Whisk together 1 Tbs. fresh lime juice, 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, ¼ tsp. kosher salt, and freshly ground black pepper, to taste. Toss with a 5 or 6 oz. bag baby arugula, kale, or spinach. Top with 1 peeled and sliced orange and ½ sliced avocado.

Simple Sautéed Greens

Sauté 1 Tbs. grated or minced garlic or ginger in 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil for 1 minute. Add two 5 or 6 oz. bags baby kale or spinach. Toss to wilt and heat through. Season with ¼ tsp. kosher salt or 2 tsp. reduced-sodium soy sauce.



FROZEN PEAS

Why they're a shortcut

Frozen peas go from package to plate in minutes. But they're a keeper for lots of reasons. Unless it's springtime, frozen peas are as close to fresh taste and texture as you're going to get. Plus, they're an easy way to bulk up your meal with an extra 4 grams of fiber and 5 grams of protein in every (60-calorie) half cup. Gotta love legumes!

Green Pea Pesto

In a food processor, pulse until minced 2 Tbs. toasted pine nuts, 1 minced clove garlic, ½ cup grated parmesan, 2 cups fresh basil leaves, ½ cup frozen peas, ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, and ½ tsp. kosher salt. Stir in ¼ cup water. Toss with cooked whole wheat pasta or bulgur or another whole grain.

Mushroom & Green Pea Sauté

Sauté ½ lb. sliced mushrooms in 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil until browned, 3–5 minutes. Add 2 sliced scallions and 1 cup thawed frozen peas. Heat through, then season with ¼ tsp. kosher salt. 🍴



FOOD FIND

Oat Yesss...



It's hot, whole grain, and sticks to your ribs. It's cheap and less processed than most cereals. It starts out free of added sugars and plays well with nuts, spices, and fruit.

You could write an ode to oatmeal.

Too late. **Bob's Red Mill** (the Shakespeare of whole grains) beat you to it. All it takes is five-to-ten minutes in the microwave or on the stovetop, and you're ready to dig into Bob's love song to an old standby:

Verse 1: **Oat Bran Hot Cereal**. Think of it as an uber-creamy Cream of Wheat that's full of fiber...a quarter of a day's worth per serving.

Verse 2: **Extra Thick Rolled Oats**. "Each oat is rolled extra thick, for folks who like their oatmeal extra hearty," says Bob.

Verse 3: **Quick Cooking Steel Cut Oats**. Steel-cut oats are chopped into larger pieces that cook up chewier (in a good way). The downside: at least 20 minutes of simmering. Bob's are chopped smaller, yet they're no less satisfying. Cooking time: 7 minutes or so.

Not a fan of naked oats?

Dress yours up with oldies but goodies like cinnamon, raisins, and walnuts. Or try fresh fruit (apples, pears, berries), nut butter (rest a spoonful on top of your hot oats until it gets all melty and drizzly), or nutrient-packed seeds (chia, pumpkin, hemp).

Mmm. So many looks. So little time.

bobsredmill.com—(800) 349-2173



DISH of the month

Bulgur Tabouli

Toss 2 cups cooked bulgur with ¼ cup chopped parsley or cilantro, ¼ cup toasted almonds, ¼ cup diced dried apricots, 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, 2 tsp. lemon juice, and ¼ tsp. kosher salt. Serves 4.

FOOD FAIL



Cinnabummer

"Enjoy our new twist on breakfast with these craveable sweet and savory breakfast products made at home!" [says Cinnabon's website](http://says.cinnabon.com).

Who *isn't* looking for new breakfast products... especially ones like Cinnabon's "breakfast creations," which are frozen, so you can "make" (that is, heat them up) at home!

And what creations they are! Take the **Caramel Pecan Ooey-Goey Rolls**. Each one packs 510 calories, 9 teaspoons of added sugars (three-quarters of a day's worth), and a third of a day's saturated fat. You might as well eat 10 Oreos for breakfast.

The rolls' three dozen ingredients include white flour, corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup, sugar, margarine, palm oil, and artificial flavors.

Pecans? Last on the list...but somehow right there in the name!

The smaller **Frosting Filled Cinn-Pastry** bumps up the sat fat (to half a day's worth), thanks to the cream cheese frosting (with more sugar and margarine than cream cheese). Yum!

Then there's the **CinnaBiscuit Chicken Sandwich**, with its cinnamon sauce (mainly brown sugar, water, sugar, and corn syrup) and cream cheese frosting chips (largely sugar and palm oil).

"Celebrating the simple pleasures that make life sweeter," says Cinnabon.

They sure nailed that "sweeter" part.

cinnabon.com—(888) 288-7655



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