

| FRESH FINDINGS |

Let There Be Light

Those unflattering fluorescent supermarket lights do have one benefit, suggests a new study: they help spinach produce more nutrients. The study, published in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, revealed that spinach stored continuously under the light for as little as three days boasted higher levels of vitamin C and preserved levels of K, E, folate and the carotenoids lutein and zeaxanthin.

The lights enhance nutrient levels by encouraging photosynthesis—the process by which plants use energy from the sun to create food and compounds that protect them. A side benefit for us: those same nutrients that protect plants protect us too. For example, carotenoids help shield a plant from sun damage. And, similarly, eating carotenoid-rich foods helps to protect our skin against sunburn, explains Gene Lester, M.S., Ph.D., plant physiologist with the USDA's Agricultural Research Service and lead author of the study. —*Amy Paturel, M.S., M.P.H.*



Do artificial sweeteners make you hungrier? —*E. Berliet, Lyon, France*

I'd hope not, since lots of people use artificial sweeteners to control calories. But the research on the topic isn't so straightforward—in fact, the effect of these sweeteners on your appetite may depend on the form in which you're consuming them.

A 2009 review concluded that artificial sweeteners in items with few if any calories, such as diet soda, may heighten appetite.

Yet the same review (published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*) also reported that artificial sweeteners eaten in combination with or in foods containing calories *don't* increase appetite. Similarly, a new study in the journal *Appetite* showed that eating an artificially sweetened appetizer—versus one that's sugar-sweetened—before a meal didn't stoke participants' appetites.

Since the 2009 review, two studies have come out on the effect on appetite of noncaloric, artificially sweetened beverages. The findings are conflicting—one study found that they increased levels of a feel-full hormone, while the other study showed no change.

There's a lot of uncertainty, but if you want something sweet, choosing items that are artificially sweetened can help you save calories. However, for overall health, I agree with Barry Popkin, Ph.D., distinguished professor of global nutrition at the University of North Carolina that “it's best to limit your consumption of added sweeteners”—artificial or not.

Brierley Wright, M.S., R.D., is associate editor of nutrition. Send her your nutrition questions at eatingwell.com/go/askus.

Take That, Belly Fat!

The secret to whittling your waistline with this Mustard Greens & Bulgur recipe isn't that it's low in calories (169 per serving). It's that three of its ingredients may help you slim down. —*Ana Mantica*

BULGUR: It's a whole grain—and swapping refined grains for whole grains may help reduce total body fat and abdominal fat, according to new research in the *Journal of Nutrition*. In the study, adults who ate about 3 servings of whole grains a day had about 2.4 percent less body fat and 3.6 percent less abdominal fat than those who ate less than a quarter of a serving. Researchers speculate that the fiber from whole grains may help you feel full with less food—and possibly fuller than fiber from other sources, such as fruit and vegetables. Aim for at least three servings of whole grains daily (one serving equals 1 cup of whole-grain cereal or a slice of whole-wheat bread).

VINEGAR: In one Japanese study, when obese adults added about 2 tablespoons of acetic acid (the active ingredient in vinegar) a day to their regular diets for 12 weeks, they gained 4 fewer pounds, about 5 percent less belly fat and 3.5 percent less total body fat than adults who didn't consume any acetic acid. Researchers suspect that the acetic acid ramps up enzymes that oxidize fat, so less fat accumulates. Add any type of vinegar—even a tablespoon—to your daily diet.

WALNUTS: In a Harvard study, researchers looked at the eating habits of more than 50,000 women over eight years. Those who reported consuming nuts at least twice a

week gained less weight than women who rarely ate nuts. Although nuts are high in calories and fat, researchers think that the combination of protein, fiber and healthy fats (mono- and polyunsaturated) help keep you feeling full. A few times a week, work an ounce of nuts (about 14 walnut halves, 20 to 24 almonds, 2 tablespoons of peanut butter) into a balanced diet.



Find this recipe and more to trim your middle at eatingwell.com/go/whittleyourmiddle.