



Dear Nikki

I have been told that eating all my fruit and vegetables raw is healthier than eating them cooked. Is this true?

No, this is untrue. Cooking food is not bad for your health. In fact, some vitamins are better absorbed after cooking. For example, lycopene found in tomatoes and tomato products is absorbed more easily in cooked form than fresh.

Cooking red and yellow fruit and vegetables, as well as dark leafy green vegetables, also allows beta carotene to be absorbed more effectively in the gut. Some nutrients, however, such as vitamin C and folate found in citrus fruit, kiwifruit, broccoli, cabbage, spinach and oranges, are unstable to heat and are best eaten raw.



Dear Nikki

I am a vegan and need to get my vitamin B12 from a non-animal source. I have heard that spirulina is a 'superfood' and has a large amount of B12. How much do I need to eat?

Spirulina is a bluish-green algae that grows in some freshwater lakes.

Although it is a rich source of beta-carotene it is not a reliable source of vitamin B12.

Recent analysis has reported that spirulina contains a vitamin B12 analogue that is not biologically active in humans.

You would be better to source your vitamin B12 from fermented soy products such as soya.



Do you need Nikki's help?

Do you have a health-related question to ask Nikki? Write to: Hart to heart, c/- New Idea, PO Box 1467, Auckland or email: newidea@pacificmags.co.nz

PROBIOTICS

How do they work?

Bacteria play a vital role in the gut and without them our systems would not function correctly. The gut normally contains large numbers of bacteria (natural microflora).

This microflora protects humans from infection, which is why it's been said that ingesting 'friendly' bacteria (probiotics) can promote gut health. The lactic acid bacteria used to produce fermented milk products are reported to be beneficial and include lactobacilli and bifidobacteria. Probiotics tend to be found in low-fat milk products and these products should be part of a healthy diet.

It should be noted, however, that a recent study of 55 products labelled as containing probiotics, found that only a fifth of them actually contained the organisms listed.

5 ESSENTIALS

For your children's lunchbox



bread

Be adventurous with selections. This carbohydrate is vital for keeping small bodies energised.



fruit

- Include fresh, in-season fruit – it's usually cheaper
- – or try fruit pottles in natural juice or dried fruit.



dairy

- This can be a tricky one to add to a lunchbox because summer months make milk undesirable to drink when warm. Add cheese or try freezing yoghurt pottles.



drinks

- Freeze drinks in summer months to keep lunchboxes fresh and cool. I suggest diluting juice with water at a 1:10 ratio.



snacks

- Include one for the first break of the day and make sure there is at least one more, especially if your child is playing sport after school and isn't getting home early.