



818 18th Street, NW • Suite 1000 • Washington, DC 20006  
202.728.7199 • fax: 202.728.7238 • [www.womenheart.org](http://www.womenheart.org)

**“An apple a day, keeps the doctor away!”**

*Alicia Kroat RD, LDN, Jennifer Fleming, MS, RD, and Penny Kris-Etherton, PhD, RD*

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics celebrates National Nutrition Month in March. This year the Academy has chosen the theme “Eat Right, Your Way, Every Day.” This theme challenges each of us to take responsibility for our own nutrition in a way that is representative of our own culture, ethnicity, lifestyle, and health concerns. For more information on National Nutrition Month, visit <http://www.eatright.org/nnm/>.

Can an apple a day really keep the doctor away? It is common knowledge that fruits and vegetables are good for us, but just how good are they? Fruits and vegetables are stocked with vitamins, minerals, and dietary fiber which promote good health. Additionally, fruits and vegetables are chock-full of phytonutrients. Phytonutrients are nonessential, natural components of foods that are thought to provide additional health benefits. Phytonutrients provide foods with properties that alert our senses. For instance, the phytonutrient lycopene is responsible for the red color found in tomatoes and watermelon and some research, while inconclusive, suggests that lycopene may be beneficial for cardiovascular and prostate health. Carotenoids give fruits and vegetables their yellow and orange colors, while flavonoids display red, blue, and purple pigmentation. Phytonutrients have unique sensory qualities that enable us to distinguish between smells of fruits and vegetables such as the smell of garlic versus the smell of an onion.

Phytonutrients play many roles in the body such as acting as an antioxidant, enhancing immune response, stimulating cancer cell death, repairing DNA damaged by toxins such as cigarette smoke, and much more. Phytonutrients may aid in the prevention of cardiovascular disease by decreasing platelet aggregation, regulating the production and absorption of cholesterol and by lowering blood pressure. In addition, antioxidants may prevent damage to bad cholesterol, or LDL, which in turn prevents damage to the inner lining of blood vessels (Nutrition and Physical Activity in Inflammation – Chapter 8: Phytonutrients and Inflammation; D. Heber).

Different fruits and vegetables have different phytonutrients with varied functions which is why it is so important to eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables with varied colors. Two common categories of phytonutrients are the carotenoids and flavonoids. See the table below for a list of common phytonutrients and their common food sources.

<b>Phytonutrient</b>	<b>Food Source(s)</b>
Alpha-carotene	Carrots
Beta-carotene	Leafy green and yellow vegetables (broccoli)
Beta-cryptoxanthin	Citrus, peaches, apricots
Lutein	Leafy greens (kale, spinach, turnip greens)
Lycopene	Tomato products, pink grapefruit, watermelon
Zeaxanthin	Green vegetables, eggs, citrus
Ellagic Acid	Strawberries, blueberries, raspberries
Anthocyanins	Fruits
Catechins	Tea, wine
Flavonols	Fruits, vegetables, tea, wine
Isoflavones	Soybeans

For more information on Phytonutrients, visit the USDA Agricultural Research Service at: <http://www.ars.usda.gov/aboutus/docs.htm?docid=4142>

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to learn more about specific nutrients of fruits and vegetables and to access the “Fruit and Vegetable Calculator” for specific quantity recommendations.  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/everyone/fruitsvegetables/index.html>

### **Vegetable of the Month:**

WATERCRESS – Watercress is an aquatic perennial plant originating from Asia and Europe. It is rich in iron, calcium, iodine, folic acid, and vitamins A & C. In addition, it is said to have many benefits including as a source of phytochemicals and antioxidants. People taking chlorzoxazone should not eat watercress as it interferes with the metabolism of the drug.

### **Vegetable Recipe of the Month**

Watercress Salad with Lime Dressing

Source: [www.foodnetwork.com](http://www.foodnetwork.com)

Servings: 3

Prep Time: 10 minutes

#### **Ingredients:**

1 bunch watercress, trimmed and coarsely chopped  
 4 sprigs fresh mint, chopped, 2 tablespoons

A handful of flat-leaf parsley, chopped  
1 heart of romaine, coarsely chopped  
1 ripe lime, juiced  
1 teaspoon sugar  
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil  
Pepper, to taste

Directions: Combine watercress, mint, parsley and romaine in a small salad bowl. Combine lime juice and sugar in a small dressing bowl. Whisk oil into lime juice in a slow stream. Pour dressing over the salad and season with pepper, to your taste.

Nutritional Analysis: Calories 150, Protein 2g, Fat 14g, Saturated Fat 2g, Calories from fat 22%, Cholesterol 0mg, Carbohydrates 6g, Fiber 1g, Sodium 15mg, Vitamin A 60%, Calcium 8%, Vitamin C 60%, Iron 8%