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Asparagus is a commonly eaten vegetable in many parts of the world and is well known for its unique, savory taste. Asparagus ranks among the top 20 foods in regards to ANDI score (Aggregate Nutrient Density Index), which measures vitamin, mineral and phytonutrient content in relation to the caloric content. To earn a high ANDI rank, food must provide a high amount of nutrients for a small amount of calories.

Consuming fruits and vegetables of all kinds has long been associated with a reduced risk of many lifestyle-related health conditions. Many studies have suggested that increasing consumption of plant foods like asparagus decreases the risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and overall mortality while promoting a healthy complexion and hair, increased energy and overall lower weight.

Asparagus is one of the best natural sources of folate. Adequate folate intake is extremely important during periods of rapid growth such as pregnancy, infancy and adolescence.

### **Health Benefits**

#### **Decreased risk of birth defects:**

Folic acid is essential for pregnant women to protect their infants against miscarriage and neural tube defects. Recent research has also shown that a father's folate status before conception may be just as important. In a study from McGill University, paternal folate deficiency in mice was associated with a 30% higher number of various birth defects than in offspring with no paternal folate deficiencies.



### **Lowered risk of depression:**

Folate may help ward off depression by preventing an excess of homocysteine from forming in the body, which can block blood and other nutrients from reaching the brain. Excess homocysteine interferes with the production of the feel-good hormones serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine, which regulate not only mood, but sleep and appetite as well.

### **Maintaining a healthy heart:**

Excess homocysteine levels are also a marker for coronary artery disease. People with above-normal levels of homocysteine are 1.7 times more likely to develop heart disease and 2.5 times more likely to suffer a stroke.

### **Osteoporosis prevention:**

Poor vitamin K intake is linked with a high risk of bone fracture. Just one cup of asparagus provides 70% of your vitamin K needs for the day. Consuming an adequate amount of vitamin K daily, improves bone health by improving **calcium** absorption and reducing urinary excretion of calcium. The iron in asparagus also plays a crucial role in maintaining the strength and elasticity of bones and joints.

### **Cancer prevention:**

Low levels of folate intake have been shown to increase the risk of breast cancer in women. Adequate intake of dietary folate (in food) has also shown promise in protecting against colon, stomach, pancreatic and cervical cancers. Although the mechanism of protection is currently unknown, researchers believe that folate's protective effects have something to do with its role in DNA and RNA production and the prevention of unwanted mutations. There is no evidence that folate supplementation provides the same anti-cancer benefits.

### **Digestion:**

Asparagus is high in both fiber and water content, which helps to prevent constipation, maintain a healthy digestive tract and lower the risk of colon cancer. Adequate fiber promotes regularity, which is crucial for the daily excretion of toxins through the bile and stool. Recent studies have shown that dietary fiber may also play a role in regulating the immune system and inflammation, consequently decreasing the risk of inflammation-related conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer and obesity. According to the Department of Internal Medicine and Nutritional Sciences Program of the University of Kentucky, high fiber intakes are associated with significantly lower risks of developing coronary heart disease, stroke, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and certain gastrointestinal diseases. Increased fiber intake has also been shown to lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, improve insulin sensitivity, and enhance weight loss for obese individuals.