



## *Can I Cook Nutrients Away?*

People often hear that cooking destroys nutrients in foods. This is primarily a concern for the B vitamins and vitamin C because prolonged heating breaks down some of these nutrients. Most other nutrients are not adversely affected by any cooking process. In fact, cooking improves digestibility of most protein. High heat "denatures" protein - that is, the structure of the protein is partially broken down before you eat it. This also serves to preserve the meat, making it less susceptible to spoilage.

Fresh vegetables versus cooked? Sometimes, frozen or canned vegetables have higher nutrient content than fresh because fresh no longer means "just picked." Produce bought in a supermarket is often picked weeks before the consumer gets them. Again, it is mostly the vitamins mentioned above that decline. Mineral content does not change. Nor does the calorie content. While boiling in water can remove some minerals, the amount is usually not nutritionally significant. If you are concerned about this, steaming is a good option.

**THE NEED TO KNOW:** Cooking methods such as frying or sautéing add fat and calories to foods. In fact, half the calories in fried chicken come from the oil it is cooked in. But the nutrient content of the chicken itself is the same no matter how it was cooked. The method of cooking, or overcooking, does not decrease nutritional value of food. Just the way protein structure is altered by cooking, the same thing happens to dietary fiber. There isn't any less.... it is just digested more easily.