



# Nutrition News You Can Use

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## Greetings

For most of the month of September I attended conferences – in a cast. Now I know that many of you have attended conferences in casts, but I think that you will agree that they can be a little challenging. With many of the new TSA rules and regulations I had the honor of complete body searches every time I boarded an airline – you know you could carry lots of stuff in a cast with a foot that is so swollen that not even another particle of air could be in there ☺.

When I was hired as the Food & Nutrition Specialist I was very honored, but attending these conferences has opened my eyes to respect that New Mexico's nutrition education programs receive from other states. At the West Virginia Diabetes Symposium we met with other states involved in the Joslin Diabetes Program. The Joslin director said the *Kitchen Creations* "Is the best community based diabetes education program in the country." Data was presented about the *Keep Moving Keep Healthy* program and again the efforts of those preparing the program were praised. When I left West Virginia, the praise did not stop. The *Just Be It* program conducted a workshop highlighting their excellent work with 5<sup>th</sup> graders and the New Mexico Affiliate of NEA-FCS was also awarded a Living Well grant.

Let me encourage you that what you are doing is making a difference not only in the lives of New Mexicans, but also is having an impact on your peers in other states. Keep up the good work, and thank you for allowing me to be a part of this amazing organization.

Carol

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## Have your pumpkin and eat it too!

There are more things you can do with a pumpkin than just carve it. Pumpkins are high in vitamin A and fiber, low in fat, and a good source of vitamin C, potassium, and phosphorus. Jack O'Lantern pumpkins may be too stringy to eat and are often too large. For cooking, select pumpkins which are a smaller, sweeter variety with closed-grained flesh. Pumpkin can be prepared in a variety of ways: baked and eaten as a vegetable; baked into a pie, or made into soup. The seeds are a popular snack when dried and sometimes roasted and salted. Here are some things to try with your pumpkins:

© Basic preparation: Rinse off any dirt before using. For pumpkin puree to use in soup, bread or pie, you can steam, boil, or bake. Peel pumpkin and cut into 1.5 to 2 inch chunks. Steam for 15 to 20 minutes, or cook in boiling water for 8 to 12 minutes. Puree. If the pumpkins are small, split and clean out the seeds and pulp. Put flesh side down in a baking pan with about ¼ cup of water. Bake at 350° F for 1.5 hours until the flesh is tender.

© Microwave preparation: wash a 1-3 pound pumpkin; cut off the top, saving the lid, scrap out the seeds and pulp, and cover the opening with plastic wrap. Make a small hole in the plastic wrap. Microwave at high until fork tender, about 8-10 minutes per pound. Cut into wedges or scoop out flesh and mash.



☉ Try making a stuffed pumpkin by cutting the top off and scooping the seeds out. Prepare a casserole of mostly precooked ingredients such as browned meat and cooked vegetables. With the ingredients still hot, place inside the pumpkin, set the pumpkin on a baking sheet and cook at 350° F for 1-3 hours, depending on the size of the pumpkin. A scooped out pumpkin also makes a nice serving bowl for salad or soup.

☉ Make pumpkin pancakes by adding fresh cooked pumpkin to your favorite pancake batter. Cook as directed and serve with warm applesauce.

☉ To dry pumpkin seeds carefully wash the seeds to remove the clinging fibrous pumpkin tissue. The seeds can be dried in a dehydrator at 115-120° F for 1-2 hours or in an oven on warm for 3-4 hours. Stir them frequently to avoid scorching. Store in an airtight container.

☉ Roasted pumpkin seeds make a tasty snack. To roast, take dried pumpkin seeds, toss with oil (1 teaspoon per cup of seeds) and roast in preheated oven at 250° F for 10-15 minutes.

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## Did You Know: Question & Answer

**Q: What is the difference between “multi-grain” and “whole grain”?**

**A:** Multi-grain simply indicates that a product is made from more than one kind of grain. For example, a multi-grain bread or cereal could be made from a combination of wheat, oats, and barley. The term does not give any information if the grains included are whole or refined grains. Whole grain means the product includes the grain’s bran and germ, which contain fiber, magnesium, vitamin B6, and vitamin E. No matter how many grains are used in the multi-grain, if the bran and germ of the grain are removed, some of the health benefits are also removed. Check the ingredient list to see if the grains are listed as whole grains. If not, enjoy multi-grain products but be sure to include several whole grain foods daily.



**Q: Is oatmeal still a whole grain if it’s the quick-cooking type?**

**A:** Yes. Quick-cooking oats and instant oatmeal both contain the same components (the bran, germ, and endosperm) of regular “old fashioned” oats. These convenience products are simply steamed, flattened, or cut in smaller pieces to cook more quickly. The fiber content listed on labels of instant oatmeal is often lower than on other varieties because a single packet usually makes a smaller serving. Although instant oatmeal retains the fiber and whole grain qualities of traditional oats, the sodium, sugar, and calorie content is often substantially higher per serving. To keep the convenience, but avoid some of the excess sugar, try mixing half a packet of sweetened instant oatmeal with half a packet of unsweetened instant oatmeal.



**Q: Does the fruit in yogurt count as a serving of fruit?**

**A:** Most commercial fruit yogurts contain about two tablespoons of fruit preserves per serving, too little to be considered a fruit serving. One serving of fresh, canned or frozen fruit is a half-cup. A quarter-cup of dried fruit (such as raisins) is also considered one serving. For a more nutritious fruit yogurt that includes a serving of fruit, spoon some plain yogurt into a bowl and add a half-cup of one or more of your favorite fruits. Your home prepared fruit yogurt will be higher in fiber and fresher tasting. It may also be lower in calories and less expensive.





**Q: Is white chocolate a healthier choice than brown chocolate?**

**A:** No. White chocolate is just as high in calories as brown chocolate and each ounce contains about an extra 1.5 grams of cholesterol-raising saturated fat. White chocolate also lacks the antioxidant phytochemicals found in brown chocolate, especially in dark chocolate. White chocolate does not contain caffeine which may be important for people extremely sensitive to caffeine. (An ounce of milk chocolate has slightly more caffeine than a cup of decaffeinated coffee and dark chocolate has about the same as a cup of regular tea). No matter what kind of chocolate you eat, remember it is a concentrated source of calories, so enjoy it in small amounts.

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## Reusable Plastic Storage Bags - Do they work?

Every day, consumers are bombarded with advertisements. If you watch TV, chances are that you've seen plastic produce bags infomercials. These bags are marketed as a solution to food that spoils quickly under normal circumstances. Whenever a product is advertised to be such a great solution to a common problem, especially in the infomercial setting, one has to wonder - does this product really work?



The concept for these bags is based on ethylene that regulates how quickly fruits or vegetables ripen. The release of ethylene doesn't stop when the fruit or vegetable is picked from the plant. When you put, for example, strawberries in a plastic container, they release ethylene. That gas is trapped in the container, where it continues to affect the berries. So, they spoil more quickly, since the ethylene they have released is doing double duty.

The advertised plastic bags do not allow the ethylene to continually affect the strawberries - or whatever fruits or vegetables are put into the bags. Instead, those gases are absorbed by the bags. The plastic produce bags are made from low density polyethylene that is coated with a fine layer of natural clay containing high levels of a mineral showed to absorb ethylene gas - Zeolite. This product is also used in water purification, laundry detergent, cat litter, and other products, and it is perfectly safe for food containers.

The plastic produce bags can hold any kind of produce, including washed and cut fruits and vegetables. Keep in mind, however, that these bags are very absorbent. That means that they will absorb the odors of the fruits and vegetables. A different plastic produce bag should be used for each type of produce stored. Otherwise, smells and flavors can transfer easily. In addition, if you cut the fruit, the juices will be absorbed and your food might dry out.

Each bag has the capacity to absorb ethylene 8-10 times. To reuse, simply rinse with water only (no soap) and let dry completely. After using the bags to extend the life of your produce for the 8-10 uses, these bags can still be used, but without the ethylene protective properties.

Remember, the plastic produce bags only work well if you take steps to reducing the spoilage of your food. For example, if you wash your peaches before you put them into the plastic bag, it is important to make sure that they are completely dry before storing them. In addition, storing your food in a cool and dark place can help you keep your foods as long as possible.