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Strawberries: Rinse, Eat, Repeat

By Jessica Clifford, MS, RDN Extension Specialist, Nutrition

Come mid to late spring, strawberries make their appearance in grocery stores and markets. Of course, you can buy strawberries all year long in most areas, but from May through June, strawberries are at their peak in color and flavor, and often on sale. Being such a beautiful berry, they often adorn cakes and fruit platters. But not only are these berries beautiful, they are also delicious and nutritious.



Strawberries are an excellent source of vitamin C and manganese. They also provide a good source of potassium and fiber. Strawberries are relatively low in sugar compared to other fruits, so for people with diabetes, strawberries are a good choice. The sugar is low and the fiber is high.

Eat strawberries for breakfast, lunch, dinner, or as a snack. Add to a smoothie, salad, oatmeal, or a pie. Strawberries can be easily tucked into your child's lunch box or snack. Because strawberries are so perishable, they should be refrigerated after purchase. However, if they will be used or eaten soon after purchase or picking, they will not deteriorate in a couple hours sitting on the counter.



Strawberries are most flavorful and sweet when they are at room temperature, so you may choose to let them come to room temperature before eating. You should always rinse your berries before eating. It is best to wait to rinse strawberries until right before you eat them or pack them. This way they don't spoil as quickly. Sliced strawberries will need to be refrigerated within 2 hours after they are sliced if not eaten.

Fun ways to enjoy strawberries with children:

- Skewer strawberries, grapes, and banana chunks (or any fruit chunks of choice) on skewers alternating fruits for a fun and delicious snack. Children can choose their fruit chunks and add to their skewer. (*Caution, whole grapes can be a choking hazard for young children.*)
- Dip strawberries in melted chocolate and let them harden for a simple dessert. Children can help dip.
- Add sliced strawberries to any salad. Strawberries pair well with a spinach salad, but any green will do. Older children can help slice strawberries with a butter knife. Younger children can help toss the salad.
- Slice strawberries and mash with a potato masher. Swirl the strawberry mash into yogurt. Children can mash and swirl.

Berries can be enjoyed in so many ways, and eaten plain, too. After all, they do come with a built-in handle.

Helping families increase physical activity and enjoy healthy foods ...

Let's Talk

Whether you choose to grow, pick, or purchase strawberries, children can get involved. When picking, children might eat more than they pick, but being part of the process is fun and rewarding. At the grocery store or farmers' market, ask children to help you pick out strawberries that are bright red with no squished pieces or mold growth. Use this time to teach them about where our food comes from. Help them understand that even when purchased at a store or farmers' market, someone worked hard to grow those berries in the dirt on a farm or in a garden. When home, ask children to help you rinse the berries before eating, to be sure they are safe to eat.



Recipe for Health Strawberry Spinach Salad

Serves 4

Ingredients:

- 4 cups baby spinach, kept whole or roughly chopped if larger leaves
- 8 strawberries (to yield 1 cup sliced strawberries), rinsed, hulled, and cut into ¼-inch thick slices
- 2 tablespoons olive oil or other vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon + 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard (optional)
- ½ teaspoon honey
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- Salt to taste

Optional add-ins: sliced onion, sliced mushrooms, chopped nuts, seeds, sliced hardboiled egg, white beans, cooked quinoa, crumbled goat cheese

Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Rinse spinach and strawberries under running water. Pat dry with a paper towel or clean cloth.
3. Cut strawberries into ¼ inch slices. Chop or tear large spinach leaves.
4. Add spinach and sliced strawberries to a large bowl and set aside.
5. In a small bowl, whisk together oil, lemon juice, mustard (if using), honey, black pepper, and salt until well mixed.
6. Pour some of the dressing over the spinach and strawberries and toss to coat.
7. Add optional add-ins, if using, and toss again. Add more dressing, as needed.

