

## FRUIT AND VEGGIE OF THE MONTH

### LETTUCE

Lettuce is a vegetable that is popular throughout the world and is readily available in supermarkets year round with hundreds of varieties to choose from. The lettuce that we see today, actually started out as a weed around the Mediterranean basin. Served in dishes for more than 4500 years, lettuce has certainly made its mark in history with tomb painting in Egypt and identification of different types of lettuces by various Greek scholars. Christopher Columbus introduced lettuce to the new world and from there, lettuce in the United States began cultivating.

Lettuces come in varying shades of green. As a rule of thumb, the darker the green, the more nutritious the leaf. In our school lunches, our lettuce of choice is Romaine lettuce because of its high vitamin A content. It is one of the key ingredients in Caesar salads. It has a loaf-like shape with darker outer leaves. It has a nice crispy texture.



One serving provides nearly 100% of the Daily Value of **vitamin A**, plus an excellent source of **vitamin C**, **vitamin K** and **folic acid** for a mere 15 calories. The unique combination of high vitamin A and C make Romaine lettuce a healthy food for your skin and immunity. Like green and red leaf lettuces, Romaine is also loaded with **beta-carotene**, lutein, and zeaxanthin making it a healthy food for your eyes. Brigham Young researchers noticed that women with the highest dietary intakes of lutein and zeaxanthin had an 18% less chance of developing cataracts than those with the lowest intakes. Boston scientists found a 43% lower risk of age-related macular degeneration (AMD) in people in the top 20% of overall carotenoid intake.

## **BANANA**

Bananas are the most popular fresh fruit in the United States. They have a peel that comes off easily, they ripen after they have been picked, there is a generous supply all year long, and they are inexpensive. Bananas have high amounts of carbohydrates as well as potassium. At about 110 calories per medium banana, bananas are a Superfood for the heart providing an excellent source of vitamin B6 and a good source of potassium and vitamin C- nutrients that help

promote heart health. Bananas have benefits for every stage in your life, such as reducing abdominal pain in children and helping lower blood pressure in adults.

Because of their impressive potassium content, bananas are highly recommended by doctors for patients whose potassium is low.

Never store unripe bananas in the refrigerator. They simply will not ripen properly because the cold interferes with the ripening process. Bringing refrigerated bananas back to room temperature will not reverse the process. Over ripe bananas can be frozen without their peel and used in smoothies or in baked goods.

