

# Don't Forget The Sprouts

by Steve Meyerowitz, "Sproutman®" author of *Wheatgrass, Nature's Finest Medicine*  
Used by permission.

The National Cancer Institute and the National Institute of Health both recommend eating 5 fresh fruits and vegetables every day. A great way to help reach that goal is to include sprouts.

Sprouts are the only form of agriculture that can be locally grown and available in all four seasons. These "baby" vegetables are grown from seed to salad in only a week. One pound of alfalfa seed will yield 10-14 pounds of fresh mini-salad greens. Whether you are on top of a mountain or in a bunker with artificial light, you can still grow this fast, organic food.

Yes, it is fast food, but you won't be sacrificing any nutrition. Alfalfa sprouts have more chlorophyll than spinach, kale, cabbage or parsley. Alfalfa, sunflower, clover and radish sprouts are all 4% Protein. Compare that to spinach - 3%, Romaine lettuce - 1.5% and Iceberg lettuce - 0.8%, and milk - 3.3%. These foods all have about 90% water. But meat and eggs are the protein foods for Americans. Meat is 19% and eggs are 13% protein (and 11% fat). But Soybean sprouts have 28% protein, and lentil and pea sprouts are 26%. Soybeans sprouts have twice the protein of eggs and only 1/10th the fat.

Grain and nut sprouts, such as wheat and sunflower, are rich in fats. While fats in flour and wheat germ have a reputation for going rancid quickly (stores should refrigerate them), fats in sprouts last for weeks. The valuable wheat germ oil in wheat sprouts is broken down into its essential fatty acid fractions, over 50% of which is the valuable Omega 6. While sunflower oil is our finest source of Omega 6, germination of the sunflower sprout micellizes the fatty acids into an easily digestible, water soluble form saving our body the trouble of breaking it down and simultaneously protecting us against the perils of rancidity. This is a great bonus for a sprout that is already popular for its crispness and nutty flavor.

Radish sprouts have 29 times more Vitamin C than milk (29mg vs 1mg) and 4 times the Vitamin A (391 IU vs 126). These spicy sprouts have 10 times more calcium than a potato (51mg vs 5mg) and contain more vitamin C than pineapple. If you examine what is happening during germination, it looks like a vitamin factory. While mature radishes contain 10 IU/100g of provitamin, the radish sprouts contain 391 IU — 39 times more! No wonder sprout lovers say you can feel the vitamins!

## **Phytochemical Factory**

Alfalfa, radish, broccoli, clover and soybean contain concentrated amounts of phytochemicals (plant compounds) that can protect us against disease. Canavanine, an amino acid analog present in alfalfa, demonstrates resistance to pancreatic, colon and leukemia cancers. Plant estrogens in these sprouts function similarly to human estrogen but without the side effects. They increase bone formation and density and prevent bone breakdown (osteoporosis). They are helpful in controlling hot flashes, menopause, PMS and fibrocystic breast tumors.

Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine researchers found substantial amounts of glucosinolates and isothiocyanates in broccoli sprouts which are very potent inducers of phase 2 enzymes that protect cells from going malignant. The sprouts contain 10-100 times higher levels of these enzymes than do the corresponding mature plants.

Alfalfa sprouts are one of our finest food sources of saponins. Saponins lower the bad cholesterol and fat but not the good HDL fats. Animal studies prove their benefit in arteriosclerosis and cardiovascular disease. Saponins also stimulate the immune system by increasing the activity of natural killer cells such as T - lymphocytes and interferon. The saponin content of alfalfa sprouts multiplies 450% over that of the unsprouted seed. Sprouts also contain an abundance of highly active antioxidants that prevent DNA destruction and protect us from the ongoing effects of aging. It wouldn't be inconceivable to find a fountain of youth here, after all, sprouts represent the miracle of birth.

### **Are Alfalfa Sprouts Safe?**

Recently, stories about alfalfa sprouts contaminated with salmonella bacteria have made the news. Salmonella is bad news, but no food is immune to it. All foods eaten raw carry that risk including fresh fruit and vegetables, which have more pathogen outbreaks than sprouts. Does this mean you should go on a 100% cooked food diet?

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), 4 million people contract salmonellosis from foods every year and 93% of these cases are caused by meat, poultry, milk and eggs. The remaining 7% of cases are from shellfish, and fresh fruits and vegetables. While fruits and veggies are safer than meat, a single outbreak from Mexican cantaloupes in 1989 caused 25,000 cases of salmonella. Compare this to sprouts: for all outbreaks over their entire 40 year history, the U.S. sprout industry has had a total of 2,000 cases.

What are sprout companies doing about it? Conscientious growers are testing sprouts for E. Coli and salmonella before they ship to the stores. The FDA has recommended the chlorination of sprouts, similar to the chlorination of our municipal waters. This achieves a 99.8% reduction of potential salmonella and E. Coli contamination. Put another way, if there was contaminated seed, there would be only a 0.02% probability that the bacteria could survive. Unfortunately, unlike meat and poultry, the tiny sprout industry is not regulated and not every sprout grower is willing to chlorinate. Sprout growers want to keep sprouts raw and organic. Alternative pasteurization methods are currently being tested. They include, among others, heat treatment of raw seeds before sprouting or soaking seeds in acetic acid (vinegar). Look for a safety seal of approval on your sprouts. It indicates your grower has been inspected by an independent certification agency.

No one can guarantee the absence of germs on any food. Food safety is an international problem and one that is partly a creation of our overburdened, complex, global food distribution network. Sprouts are nothing but a blip on the radar screen. Let's put things in perspective. According to the National Weather Service, lightning strikes 1.29 people per million each year. The CDC declares that E. Coli contamination from all foods afflicts 1.10 people per million each year. Since your chances of getting hit by lightning are greater than contracting e-coli, it is a good bet that the benefits of eating these super-nutritious baby vegetables far outweighs the risks.

***About the author:** Steve Meyerowitz, "Sproutman" is the author of several books on health, diet, and nutrition including *Wheatgrass Nature's Finest Medicine*, *Power Juices Super Drinks*, and *Juice Fasting and Detoxification* among others. For more information about this subject, you can visit [www.Sproutman.com](http://www.Sproutman.com).*