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Broccoli Rabe

Introduction:

Broccoli rabe is a member of the cruciferous vegetable (Brassica) family. Historically harvested in Mediterranean and Asian countries, this species is also referred to as rapini (“little turnip tops”). It bears resemblance to a traditional broccoli floret, but in actuality is a variation of the turnip. Broccoli rabe has an intense but pleasing taste offering texture, flavor and a vibrant green color to various dishes including stir fry, pasta or quiche. The addition of broccoli rabe can contribute to a more plant focused and healthier traditional Western diet.

Nutritional Profile and Health Benefits:

The nutrition profile for broccoli rabe is quite impressive. These small plants contain a combination of over 20 vitamins and minerals, fiber, phytochemicals and antioxidants. For comparison, its nutritional composition resembles that of mustard greens.

It is important to note that broccoli rabe is very low calorie (22 calories per 100grams) and is primarily water based (93%). Broccoli rabe contains a high concentration of dietary fibers (both soluble and insoluble sources). When consumed, soluble fiber is partially digested leaving a sticky gel residue which works to trap dietary fat and cholesterol and remove it from the body before the packaging of LDL (“lousy”) cholesterol and triglycerides (fat in the bloodstream) can occur. An adequate intake of soluble fibers has been directly linked to improved cardiovascular health by reduction in inflammatory processes and platelet aggregation (caused by elevated LDL and triglyceride levels). In addition, soluble fibers work favorably on glycemia (blood sugar levels) in the body by causing the slow and steady release of glucose into the bloodstream. Working together with soluble fiber, insoluble fiber is indigestible and provides a forceful sweep of the gut and intestinal tract removing waste, toxins and possible carcinogens before they can lead to disease development. Dietary fiber is also a key component to promoting meal satiety. Natural food sources of fiber, like broccoli rabe, fill gut volume leading to decreased hunger and need for more calorically dense foods.

Broccoli rabe contains high levels of antioxidants. Most notably, the large quantities of Vitamin C and Vitamin A contribute favorably on the body’s immune system by neutralizing free radicals and their ability to cause cellular inflammation. Abundant levels of Vitamin K provide preventive properties and protect against bone loss. Glucosinolates, an additional phytonutrient, convert to sulfurorphanes and indoles compounds in the body which are well established cancer fighting compounds.

The nutritional composition of broccoli rabe is well rounded with inclusion of calcium, magnesium and potassium. These minerals work synergistically in the body to promote regulated blood pressure and cardiac function. In smaller quantities, the B complex vitamins, including folate, are present and have documented associations to cancer prevention and improved heart health. In conclusion, the culmination of stated nutritional characteristics provide a positive adjunct to one's diet promoting reduction of obesity, glycemic disorders, cancers and cardiovascular disease states.