

Men's Fitness
February 2009
2,866,504 Impressions



GET FUNGI

THEY MIGHT SEEM DULL, BUT MUSHROOMS ARE MAGIC FOR YOUR HEALTH

By Elizabeth M. Ward, M.S., R.D.

WHY YOU NEED THEM

- Mushrooms are packed with ergothioneine and selenium—two antioxidants that quash free radicals (compounds that run around your body intent on damaging your DNA and sparking heart disease and cancer). Portobello and cremini mushrooms harbor the highest concentrations of ergothioneine, while button mushrooms are packed with selenium.
- They're the only type of fresh produce to contain vitamin D. One cup of cooked white mushrooms serves up 12% of a guy's daily need for the nutrient, which bolsters healthy bones and teeth, strengthens the heart, and reduces the risk of certain cancers and diabetes.
- The copper in mushrooms can help to keep your energy level running on a natural high. The secret? Copper enhances production of the red blood cells needed to transport oxygen to your brain and muscles. The more oxygen these regions have, the more energetic you feel.
- They'll help to keep you lean. One recent study found that people who ate dishes made with white mushrooms instead of meat lowered their calorie consumption by 420, and they took in 30 fewer grams of fat over a four-day period. That's the equivalent of about 11 pounds of body fat in a year's time. (For starters, try a mixture of 50/50 ground beef and mushrooms, or even 70/30 until you get used to the taste.)
- They'll make you look more buff as well. By weight, 'shrooms are about 90% water, virtually sodium free, and brimming with potassium—all of which prevent puffiness and help to accentuate your muscles.

AT THE STORE...

Select smooth, dry mushrooms that are free from major blemishes. Avoid those with brown gills under the cap; they're older and may taste bitter. Store mushrooms in a paper bag and clean right before eating, to reduce the risk of early spoilage.

A MUSHROOM BY ANY NAME

Button > The most popular mushroom, buttons are small and white with a mild, versatile taste that works in almost any dish. Eat them cooked or fresh from the package.

Morel > Loved by foodies all over the world, these wild mushrooms are up to four inches across, with a spongy, honeycomblike texture. Their taste is just as unique: smoky, slightly nutty, and increasingly intense the darker the mushroom ultimately becomes.

Portobello > A large, dark mushroom with a cap that's generally six or more inches across. Since these 'shrooms are older, they have exposed gills and are drier than others, giving them a tougher, meatlike consistency that works great in sandwiches.

Shiitake > Dark brown, with caps up to eight inches across, these expensive mushrooms have a rich, meaty steak-like taste and work perfectly in stir-fries. The stems are tough and good for flavoring soups. (You can also buy dried shiitakes, which need to be rehydrated in water before use.)

Straw > These tiny nuggets are sometimes sold fresh but are more often available canned in Asian markets. Since they're grown in piles of straw, they have an earthy, slightly musty flavor that's very distinct from other farmed mushrooms.