

Nutri- Notes
BETA CAROTENE FOODS
Nancy Berkoff, RD, EdD

Recipe: Potage Beta-Carotene
makes 5 servings

1 ½ pounds peeled fresh carrots, sliced thin
1 ½ cups carrot juice (canned or fresh)
1 Tablespoon margarine or butter
2 teaspoons orange juice concentrate
2 teaspoons curry powder
1 ½ cups vegetable broth
1 cup carrot juice
2 teaspoons lemon zest
½ cup silken tofu or plain yogurt

In a large pot, simmer carrots, carrot juice, margarine, concentrate and curry powder and vegetable broth until almost all the liquid has evaporated, about 45 minutes.

In a blender or food processor, combine cooked carrots, 1 cup carrot juice, lemon zest and tofu and process until very smooth. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours or freeze until ready to eat. This allows the soup to thicken.

Note: Serve this cold soup on a hot night or heat it and serve it hot on a cold night! This soup can also be made with deeply-colored winter squash, such as butter nut, in place of the carrots.

Eating For Your Eyes

On the food front, we have known for many years that diet and eye health are connected. The ability to see in dim light is directly linked to amount of Vitamin A you consume. For years, parents have urged their children to eat more carrots. We should urge people from all age groups to “eat for their eyes,” as Vitamin A, is important for night vision, the ability to perceive colors and for the health of the physical structures of the eye.

Nowadays we know that you can add mango, papaya, red bell pepper, cantaloupe, orange- and yellow-fleshed squash, cranberry products, pink grapefruit, oranges, tangerines, dark green leafy veggies, like spinach and Swiss chard, fortified cereals and dairy products and peaches and apricots to that list.

In 1968, George Wald won the Noble Prize in medicine for identifying the mechanism by which Vitamin A is linked to vision. Vitamin A, in the form of retinal, plays a key role in moving light images from the eye to the brain. In the eye, retinal combines with a protein to form a visual pigment called rhodopsin. Rhodopsin changes energy from light entering the eye into a nerve impulse. This nerve impulse is sent to the vision center of the brain. The brain interprets the information from the nerve impulse and issues appropriate messages to the part of the body that needs to respond. This light-into-energy reaction occurs every time light enters and passes through the eye. Every time this occurs, some Vitamin A is needed. If there is no rhodopsin, then there is no impulse sent to the brain. With no information, the brain cannot react to what is going on around it.

Your body is able to synthesize many vitamins, including Vitamin A. Beta carotene, a plant pigment, is the building block the body needs to form Vitamin A. Beta carotenes are found in yellow, green, orange and red pigmented fruits and vegetables. You can't always use color strictly as a beta carotene guide, as romaine lettuce, which looks pretty pale, is relatively high in beta carotene, while corn, which is deeply colored, has very little accessible beta carotene.

Something you must note about Vitamin A is that too much of a good thing is not a good thing. It is possible to ingest a toxic level of Vitamin A, especially in supplement form. A good guide might be to make your meals colorful with beta-carotene, rather than reaching for the vitamin bottle!

Side Bar: The Vitamin A You Eat

Food	Percentage of adult RDA for Vitamin A
3 oz cooked beef liver	900 %
3 oz cooked chicken liver	400 %
4 oz raw carrots	150 %
2 egg yolks	25%
4 oz cooked spinach	80 %
3 fresh apricots	25 %
4 oz cantaloupe cubes	24 %
4 oz cooked mustard greens	22 %
8 oz dairy milk	18 %

1 slice cheese pizza	16 %
4 oz raw tomatoes	5 %
8 oz steamed white rice	2 %
1 Cliff Energy Bar	200 %
1 can Slim Fast	70%
1 oz Quaker Instant Oats	40%
1 oz Special K	30%
1 oz Total cereal	20%
1 Tablespoon Country Crock Margarine	20%