Spinach - great for good health

Popeye (of the cartoon) is synonymous with eating spinach, a product that has tremendous health benefits much of which is not promoted much these days. As intimidating as spinach may be to the average consumer, it can be a culinary delight if prepared in creative ways.

Originating in Persia as a wild plant, spinach has been cultivated for the last 2,000 years in China and other parts of Asia and the Middle East for culinary and medicinal purposes. Spinach is a dark-green, leafy nutrient-dense vegetable that belongs to the same family as beets and chard. Spinach is rich in vitamin K, C and folic acid. It has large amounts of the antioxidant, beta-carotene and carotenoids - lutein and zeaxanthin useful in cancer prevention. Antioxidants Medline Plus defines antioxidants as "substances that may protect your cells against the effects of free radicals. Free radicals are molecules produced when your body breaks down food, or by environmental exposures like tobacco smoke and radiation. Free radicals can damage cells, and may play a role in heart disease, cancer and other diseases".

Carotenoids Carotenoids are the colorful plant pigments some of which the body can turn into vitamin A, a powerful antioxidant that can help prevent some forms of cancer and heart disease and boost the immune system. These precursors to vitamin A are sometimes called pro-vitamin A. Flavanoids Spinach is also rich in flavonoids which are antioxidants found naturally in plants. They are organic compounds that have no direct involvement with the growth or development of plants. More simply put, flavonoids are plant nutrients that when consumed in the form of fruits and vegetables are non-toxic as well as potentially beneficial to the human body (www.wisegeek.com) Health benefits

Spinach is low in calories with one cup providing only 41 calories. Osteoporosis: Other health benefits of spinach include preventing osteoporosis. Calcium in spinach prevents osteoporosis as well as safeguarding your skeletal structure. Spinach also contains other bone building nutrients such as calcium and magnesium and is good for sufferers of arthritis. Spinach is also packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants — ranking third behind garlic and another 'green' kale or Indian kale. Vitamin K is found in spinach and studies show that vitamin K can improve bone density and lower the risk of hip fracture, Eye protection: Eating spinach can help prevent eye disease, especially degeneration of the eyes in older persons. The anti-oxidant value of spinach boosts the retina preventing it from exposure to sunlight.

Heart protection: Consuming spinach contributes to reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases. Boosts iron absorption: Spinach gives a boost of energy with a high dosage of iron. However, spinach contains a chemical called oxalic acid, which binds with iron and calcium and reduces the amount of these minerals that your body can take. To improve iron absorption, eat your spinach with vitamin C-rich foods such as orange juice, tomatoes, and citrus fruit. Spinach is known for its role in curing anemia. Chicken and Spinach Soup recipe 6 oz. of chicken breasts. 6 oz. of fresh spinach. 4 cups of chicken stock. 2 tbs. soy sauce. 2 tbs. spring onions, chopped finely. 2 tsp. sugar. Method: 1. Remove the spinach stems and wash the spinach. 2. Blanch the leaves for a few seconds in boiling water, until they are just wilted. 3. Pour cold water over the spinach leaves. 4. Slice the chicken breasts fairly thin. 5. In another pot of boiling water, cook the chicken slices for about two minutes, until they are white and have gone slightly firm. 6. Drain both the spinach and the chicken. 7. Bring the chicken stock to a simmer. then add the soy sauce and the sugar. 8. Add the cooked spinach and chicken. 9. Bring the soup back to a simmer; then add the spring onions. Serve hot. Source: www.spinachrecipes.org