shiitake
the healing mushroom

EAT MORE SHIITAKES AND YOU CAN EXPECT LOWER CHOLESTEROL, A STRONGER IMMUNE SYSTEM, AND POSSIBLY EVEN YOUNGER-LOOKING SKIN. HERE’S HOW TO BENEFIT WHILE ENJOYING EVERY BITE

By Neil Zevnik

Next time you’re in the produce section of your favorite local market, linger by the tray of shiitake mushrooms, close your eyes, and imagine you’re hearing the whisper of wind through the trees and the subtle pulse of distant drums. That atavistic thrill you feel has its remote origins in the foraging activities of your hunter-gatherer ancestors. Mushrooms have been a plentiful and vital diet staple for millennia. And down through the centuries, their delicious taste, dense nutrition, and medicinal benefits have made them popular in civilizations worldwide.

Health Benefits

Shiitakes have been used for medicinal purposes in China for more than 6,000 years, and modern science is revealing why. The legendary benefits of this unique fungus have been traced to two primary components—lentinan and eritadenine.

Lentinan is being used to treat cancer, AIDS, diabetes, chronic fatigue syndrome, hepatitis B, and fibrocystic breast disease, among other maladies. An immunostimulant that enables the body to boost its own defenses, lentinan activates certain cells and proteins that attack cancer, for example, and produces antibodies to hepatitis B. Studies have shown that lentinan may be more effective against influenza and clairvoyance, and stimulate sexual appetite. Almost every culture has valued and even revered the mushroom. The exception was Great Britain in the 18th century, where mushrooms were feared and derided; indeed, The London Art of Cookery in 1784 referred to them as "treacherous gratifications."

Shiitake Pita Sandwiches
Serves 6

Earthy and satisfying, these pitas can be served with a side of mesclun salad drizzled with balsamic vinaigrette for a perfect vegetarian meal.

2 Tbs. organic extra virgin olive oil
1 Tbs. organic unsalted butter
12 oz. fresh shiitake mushrooms, stems removed, sliced into 1/4-inch strips
3 medium shallots, peeled and thinly sliced
1 medium yellow bell pepper, ribs and seeds removed, sliced into thin vertical strips
1 clove garlic, minced (1 tsp.)
1 15 oz. can organic white beans, drained and rinsed
1 handful shredded fresh basil
7 oz. French feta cheese, crumbled (optional)
3 pita breads, cut in half to make 6 pockets

1. Heat olive oil and butter in large skillet over medium heat until butter melts. Add mushrooms, shallots, bell pepper, and garlic. Cook until shallots and peppers soften, stirring often, about 5 minutes. Gently stir in beans, and cook until beans warm, about 2 minutes.

PER SERVING: 267 CAL; 10 G PROT; 8 G TOTAL FAT (2 G SAT FAT); 43 G CARB; 5 G CHOL; 529 MG SOD; 7 G FIBER; 3.4 G SUGARS
Did You Know?

Eating organic produce and organic processed fruits and vegetables will increase your antioxidant intake by about 30% over conventionally grown produce!


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On the Table

Shiitakes contain a generous amount of protein, plus all the essential amino acids, so they make an ideal substitute for meat in any meal.

Log-grown as opposed to sawdust-grown shiitakes are far more nutritious, but chances are your grocer will not be able to tell you which method was used. A fairly reliable way to tell is by cap size: If the caps are thick and the sizes vary, they're likely log-grown; uniform size with thin caps, they came from sawdust.

Choose shiitakes that are firm and plump, with no wrinkles or slimy spots. To clean, gently wipe with a moist paper towel. Remove the stem, and you're ready to enjoy this succulent and nearly miraculous treat.