

Cooperative Extension

Promoting Healthy Families, Schools and Communities

FCHS SPOTLIGHT

What Types of Programming do You Offer?

As the Cape May County FCHS Educator/Assistant Professor, I present on areas of nutrition, wellness, and physical activity to audiences of all ages. Popular presentations like *Avoiding Stress Eating*, *Benefits of exercise*, *Make Time for Snack Time* and *Nutrition Label-411* emphasize the need for continuous self-care to protect against chronic disease. I have undertaken virtual programming because of the COVID-19 pandemic and plan to engage in a hybrid presentation format consisting of in person and virtual programming in post-pandemic times to reach a broader audience. The fourth Thursday of every month I implement a virtual Lunch and Learn program for participants to learn while they enjoy their lunch at work. Topics are covered in just 30 minutes and include wellness, nutrition, and physical activity.

What Project Do You Currently Spend Most of Your Time On?

During October 2020, celebrated as "Seafood Month", I organized a collaboration of presentations between the Departments of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Family and Community Health Sciences to present *What's the Catch? -New Jersey Seafood & Healthy Living*. This program began as a two-part presentation series highlighting the nutrition benefits of seafood along with the fishery and aquaculture industry in NJ. The presentation information is now being distributed through fact sheets and journal articles. I plan to begin a consumption study on seafood in 2021. I enjoy educating the public and then discovering further outreach opportunities in line with public needs.

Name One FCHS Resource You Think More Consumers Should Know About?

Wellness Wednesdays- a new on-line webinar program from FCHS delivers virtual lessons weekly from my FCHS Department. Participants can sit in the comfort of their home or office and listen/watch various department members present on a multitude of interesting health and wellness topics. Best of all, if a person misses a topic, they can view the recorded presentation later! It is a great addition to the FCHS Department virtual resources!



What Makes FCHS Programs/Resources Unique?

FCHS offers expertise and evidence-based information to keep NJ communities healthy.

What Nutrition/Health/Wellness Mantra Do You Live By?

Making time for wellness today means feeling better tomorrow.



Christine Zellers, MPP

Name, Title, Credentials:
Christine Zellers, MPP,
Family and Community Health Sciences
Educator/Assistant Professor

City & County of Office Location:
Cape May Courthouse, Cape May
County

Number of Years with Extension: 7 years



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Nutrition's Supportive Role in Mental Health

Breana Penzenik, *Dietetic Intern, Montclair State University*
Karen Ensle EdD, RDN, FAND, CFCS, *Preceptor & FCHS Educator, Union County*



Now more than ever, our mental health has been tested by the elevated stress we're feeling from our new normal. Not only is there an increased concern for our physical health during this time but a heightened focus on our mental health as well. The most common ways to cope are by utilizing relaxation exercises, socially connecting with others, getting enough physical activity and well-rested sleep. However, many of us may not be aware of the role nutrition plays on our mental wellbeing because it's not frequently discussed. New research is continually emerging in this area to examine the link between our food choices and the impact it has on our mental state. From improvement in mood to a reduction in symptoms caused by mental illness, all aspects of mental health can benefit from an adequate, nutritionally-rich intake.

When under periods of mental stress, most people tend to eat too much or too little causing changes in eating behaviors. The same goes for mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety. During difficult times, food can become a way of coping, easily forgotten about, or just simply disinteresting. When drastic changes in eating occur, it affects our mood and energy levels. This is mainly due to changes in metabolism from perceived stress by the body, low blood sugar from not eating or fluctuations from consuming more sugar than normal. Hypoglycemia is known to cause feelings of fatigue, irritability, and even anxiety. Another main contributor to mood irregularity is thought to be the Western diet due to its connection to brain inflammation which has several links to causing anxiety and depression. Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) has revealed great concern over our nation's overconsumption of saturated fats, sodium and added sugars.



We must be mindful of our own eating habits in order to create sustainable changes in our physical and mental health. This can be done by creating goals surrounding more consumption of nutrient-dense foods, including lean proteins, whole grains, healthy fats, fiber-rich fruits and vegetables. This way of eating will keep you fuller for longer since it won't be so readily absorbed, like refined carbohydrates or sugar. Also, the Mediterranean diet has been shown to have protective effects on mental health due to its anti-inflammatory properties. This diet is high in omega-3s and vitamin D which are two nutrients commonly recognized for boosting mood and lessening symptoms of mild to moderate depression.

Another way to keep mood and energy levels in check is to stick to a mealtime schedule to eat at regular intervals throughout the day. It may help to prepare food ahead of time to reduce stress, refrain from making unhealthy food choices, or make it easy to skip meals and snacks. Also, try getting creative with a new recipe to design a wholesome meal that will be appealing. You can even make it a social activity by involving family or friends. This way you can enjoy a nutritious, brain-boosting meal and further enhance your mood by connecting with others! Remember, taking small steps to include those healthy foods: including lean proteins, whole grains, healthy fats, fiber-rich fruits and vegetables will help your physical and mental health.

Reference: U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025. 9th Edition. December 2020. Available at: <https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/>

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Editors:

Karen Ensle, EdD, RD, FADA, CFCS
Family & Community Health Sciences Educator

Alexandra Greci, MS, RD, LDN, CDE
Family & Community Health Sciences Educator

Rachel Tansey, MA
Senior FCHS Extension Associate

Kathleen Morgan, DMH, DTR
Interim Department Chair

Financial Manager: **Lynn Reid**

Please send any questions to:
Rutgers Cooperative Extension
Dept. of Family & Community Health Sciences
88 Lipman Drive, New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8525
848-932-3661

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Preventing Cancer with Nutrition

Melissa Cudia, Rutgers ISPP Program Dietetic Intern

Sarah Curran MHS, RD, FCHS Program Associate and Preceptor, Warren County



Almost 40% of Americans will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime. It's estimated that over 1.8 million will be diagnosed in 2020 alone. With staggering numbers, it may feel like there is nothing to do to reduce your risk of cancer, but there are changes you can make. Understanding the risk factors you can change and those you cannot can help you and your healthcare provider ensure you are taking all possible steps to reduce your cancer risk.

As said before, there are some risk factors that you can control and some you cannot. Genetics, family history, some genetic disorders, environmental exposures and lifestyle choices can all possibly contribute to cancer. While you cannot control your genetics or where you come from, there are lifestyle changes you can make. Around 4 in 10 cancer cases in America are linked to these lifestyle choices like smoking, physical activity, and poor nutrition as well. Here are some nutrition ones to consider:

Alcohol intake: Despite the health benefits that have been associated with phytochemicals within grapes and red wine, recommendations are to avoid or limit alcohol consumption as there is no evidence of a safe level for cancer prevention. Limiting intake to only two servings of alcohol, or two 5oz glasses of red wine, a week is best if not avoided completely. Risks increase after just one serving a day for women, and 2 servings a day for men.

Calcium and Vitamin D: As you may know, calcium and vitamin D work together in your body in order to provide many health benefits, such as bone health. Unfortunately, vitamin D deficiency is very common and can increase your risk of some cancers. Ensuring adequate consumption of vitamin D and calcium can decrease these chances. This can be done through diet alone, but sunlight and supplements can also help reach your daily recommended amount as well.

Fiber: There are many benefits that come with a steady intake of dietary fiber, reducing your cancer risk. A diet high in fiber is associated with inverse instances of breast and colon cancer. Studies have also shown protection against cancer of the esophagus, mouth, pharynx, stomach, rectum, endometrium and ovaries. So making sure you are eating enough fiber-rich foods everyday like beans and peas, and not relying on fiber supplements, is a good step in cancer prevention.

Fruit and Vegetable intake: Eating more than five servings a day of fruits and vegetables can help reduce your chance of many chronic diseases, including cancer. Fruits and vegetables are high in vitamins, minerals, fiber, antioxidants, and phytochemicals. These nutrients found in fruits and vegetables have been shown to prevent cancer and fight free-radicals. Consuming the recommended serving, or more, of your daily fruits and vegetables can help lower your risk of cancer.



Red and processed meat: Eating patterns high in red meat are associated with an increased risk of prostate, pancreatic, stomach, colon and rectal cancer. Examples of red meat are beef, pork, and lamb. Along with red meat, processed meats have additionally been linked to several cancers. Examples of processed meat include meats that have been preserved with chemicals, been smoked, and/or cured. Limiting intake of red meat to less than 18 ounces a week, and processed meats to as little as possible or none at all, can help in preventing certain cancers.

Sugar: Diets high in excess sugar are linked both directly and indirectly to an increased risk of cancer. Naturally occurring, as well as added sugars, add to overall caloric intake. If

consumed in excess, this can lead to obesity, which has shown increased instances of cancer cases. Directly, sugar consumption is related to increases in hormones like, insulin, estrogen, and IGF-I (Insulin-like Growth Factor I) that help to regulate sugar levels, but also play a strong role in cell growth. Evidence has shown that eating patterns that contain high sugar amounts have shown an effect on these hormones, leading to an increased risk of cancer.

Understanding the role that not only genetics but lifestyle choice play in the development of cancer, can help you feel more in control of your health. It is within your power to decide what you fuel your body with, and how you use it. Limit consumption of alcohol, sugar, and red or processed meats to avoid giving your body too much of what it does not need. Focus on consuming adequate amounts of calcium, vitamin D, fiber, fruits and vegetables to provide your body with all the fuel it does need. Participate more in regular exercise and limit engagement in dangerous activities like smoking and sunbathing. Overall, a well-balanced diet with adequate intake of a variety of foods, following evidenced based dietary guidelines, is a good step along with talking with your physician to lower your risk of developing cancer.



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Adaptogens

Amanda Fischer, *Dietetic Intern, Montclair State University*

Karen Ensle EdD, RDN, FAND, CFCS, *Preceptor & FCHS Educator, Union County*



What are adaptogens?

The term was first coined in 1947 by Soviet toxicologist N. V. Lazarev, referring to substances that help the body “adapt” to various physical, environmental, biological, and psychological stressors, as acting in non-specific ways, and have been used for centuries in cultural practices like Traditional Chinese medicine and Ayurveda. It may sound like a hoax to you, but don’t be so quick to pass judgement. There isn’t much extensive scientific data to back what adaptogens specifically do, but that is because the same adaptogen can function differently in different people or even in the same person. And that is the point- they are not pharmaceutical drugs with a specific function. Their function is to help the body increase and/or decrease its response (adapt) to stress.



How do adaptogens work? Do they actually work?

Adaptogens interact with the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and the sympathoadrenal system, both of which are involved in the body’s hormonal and physiological response to stress. In other terms, they are like the Star Wars Jedi of the body – they fight to restore balance.

It wasn’t until recently that adaptogens made their way into Western medicine. Previously, they had been used for hundreds of years in many other cultures like Chinese, Russian, Indian, and Scandinavian. Today, they have become a hot topic in the modern trendsetting world- think mushroom coffee, golden milk turmeric latte, and superfood Bliss Balls.

Adaptogens are a class of plants that can be taken in a variety of dosages and forms, from teas to powders, tinctures to pills. When taken over time, they can help train the body to adapt back to normal health and could be your next stress management tool alongside yoga, meditation, sleep, and a balanced diet.

Science is still uncertain and continues to emerge. These supplements are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), so it is important to research the sourcing and company selling the adaptogen. ALWAYS consult with your physician first if you are taking any medications, pregnant or breastfeeding, or have any other concerns. Side effects may be rare but it’s still important to practice caution.

Common Adaptogens

- ◆ **Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*):** A root used to combat stress and anxiety. It is described as having a deep, earthy flavor, and a “horselike” odor, living up to its name, which is derived from the Sanskrit *ashva*, meaning “horse,” and *gandha*, meaning “smell.”
- ◆ **Holy Basil (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*):** Also known as tulsi, is widely used as a calming herbal tea and has been called the “elixir of life.” It’s been reported to help promote homeostasis and adaptation to stress, restoring immunity and neurocognition.
- ◆ **Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*):** Turmeric’s active compound, curcumin, is well known for its anti-inflammatory properties. Turmeric root resides in the ginger family and can be used fresh or dried. It is commonly seen as a powder (spice) and often used paired with black pepper to increase the body’s absorption of curcumin.
- ◆ **Ginseng:** Ginseng contains ginsenosides (antioxidant), which are believed to help improve energy levels, prevent fatigue and exhaustion, and assist in recovery.
◆ **Asian ginseng (*Panax ginseng*):** Also known as Korean ginseng, is considered a true ginseng because it contains ginsenosides. This root has a warming, heat producing or stimulating effect, and is thought to increase physical endurance and reduce fatigue and to improve the ability to cope with stress. It is said to be more suitable for the elderly.
◆ **American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*)** is considered a true ginseng due to its ginsenoside content, but with a different chemical makeup from Asian ginseng. This root is considered less stimulating than Asian ginseng, and helps boost the immune system and balance blood sugar levels. It is said to be suitable for young and middle aged people and can be used long term.
◆ **Siberian ginseng or Eleuthero root (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*)** is actually not a ginseng as it does not contain ginsenosides but is instead rich in eleutherosides. Siberian ginseng can be used long term to help increase energy and the body’s resistance to stress, and is commonly used to alleviate general fatigue, and improve mental and physical performance during periods of stress.
- ◆ **Rhodiola (*Rhodiola rosea*):** This herb has been noted to interact with the HPA system to reduce cortisol

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COVID-19 Action Steps

Barbara O'Neill, Ph.D., CFP®, Distinguished Professor and Extension Financial Management Specialist Emeritus Rutgers, Cooperative Extension



COVID-19 reached American soil ten months ago and business closures and layoffs have thrown the incomes and assets of millions of U.S. households into a downward spiral. Americans can be grouped into one of three categories according to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their financial lives:

- **Reduced income and struggling**
- **Stable income but anxious**
- **Increased income with opportunities.**

Regardless of what group you fall into, there are things you can do to stabilize your finances, build resiliency, and enhance financial security. Below are ten action steps to consider during the months ahead:

- ◆ **Develop Expense Categories-** Make three lists of expenses: Needs necessary for survival (e.g., rent, utilities, food, medication copays, transportation, phone/internet, and health insurance), Obligations (e.g., credit cards and student loans, child support, taxes, and dues), and Wants (expenses not required for survival or you have no obligation to pay).
- ◆ **Prioritize Expenses-** Starting with needs, put expenses in priority order and pay bills until money runs out. One way to prioritize expenses is to consider the consequences of non-payment for each expense. What is the worst thing that could happen if a certain expense is not paid? With this “lens,” food is always the highest priority need. People need food to survive. However, food may be available from food pantries, which can free up cash for other basic needs.
- ◆ **Assess Household Resources-** Calculate personal or household net worth (assets minus debts) to get a “snapshot” of your finances. Pay particular attention to cash on hand, emergency fund savings, and cash value life insurance and retirement savings plan assets that could be borrowed against, if necessary.
- ◆ **Maintain Health Insurance-** Take advantage of employer health insurance for as long as it lasts. After that, seek new coverage. Four options for laid off workers are: a spouse’s employer plan, Medicaid (if eligible), COBRA through a previous employer (if that employer still exists), and Marketplace coverage under the Affordable Care Act. ACA options are usually cheaper, especially with subsidies on a reduced income. Visit www.healthcare.gov for details.
- ◆ **Beef Up Your Emergency Fund-** Save more, if possible, because economic conditions (personal, local, and global) can change. Experts are now recommending larger emergency funds equaling six to nine months expenses (or more), given the extent of COVID-19 related job losses. Save as much as you can whenever you can.
- ◆ **Consider Refinancing Your Mortgage-** Consider replacing your current mortgage with a lower interest loan if the math makes sense (i.e., the interest rate savings for a projected loan term exceeds the closing costs). Mortgage interest rates are at currently at historic lows, which makes homeownership attractive.
- ◆ **Make Prudent Home Improvements-** Consider making home improvements that simultaneously increase the comfort of your home and provide a high return on investment (ROI) if a move becomes necessary. Examples include bathroom and kitchen remodeling, landscaping, and the addition of a deck or patio. Many people are improving their homes by reallocating funds that were previously budgeted for cancelled travel and entertainment plans.
- ◆ **Get Estate Plans in Order-** Review your existing estate plans and revise them, if necessary. Witnessing over 250,000 Americans dead due to COVID-19 is a powerful reminder to have key legal documents (e.g., will, living will, and durable power of attorney) in place. Expect some delays as many attorneys are swamped.
- ◆ **Increase Retirement Savings-** Consider upping retirement savings plan contributions if COVID-19 has resulted in increased income and/or reduced expenses (e.g., commuting, childcare, and/or eating out). Increasing savings by just 1% more of pay can result in tens of thousands of dollars of extra savings over several decades.
- ◆ **Be Philanthropic-** Reap the financial benefits of contributions to qualified 501(c)(3) organizations that can help others who are hurting due to COVID-19. For the 2020 tax year, as a result of the CARES Act, taxpayers can take an “above the line deduction” and write off up to \$300 of cash donations without having to itemize deductions.

Easy Ways to Improve Lunchrooms and Increase Consumption of Nutritious Foods

Joanne Guldin, Intern, Rowan College at South Jersey
Luanne J. Hughes MS, RDN, FCHS Educator, Gloucester County



National School Lunch Program

Every year, over 30 million children are fed by the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). This is a federally assisted meal program that offers students the opportunity to select and consume a balanced diet for little to no cost each school day. The Smarter Lunchroom Movement applies research-based principles to influence or “nudge” students towards choosing healthier, more nutritious foods at school. The Cornell University Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs was created under a grant from the USDA to disseminate research about

healthy lunchroom strategies from Cornell University and other institutions. The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement is that outreach program. It works towards utilizing the Smarter Lunchroom strategies in all schools participating in the NSLP.

What Is the Purpose of Smarter Lunchrooms?

The goal of the movement is to use low- or no-cost solutions to change cafeteria environments and promote healthy eating behaviors. The movement is dedicated to providing schools with the knowledge, motivation, and resources needed to build a lunchroom that influences children to make healthier choices without eliminating other options. Smarter Lunchrooms applies six principles of behavioral economics to the school lunchroom:

- 1 Manage Portion Sizes
- 2 Increase Convenience
- 3 Improve Visibility
- 4 Enhance Taste Expectations
- 5 Utilize Suggestive Selling
- 6 Set Smart Pricing Strategies

The Smarter Lunchroom Movement believes in preserving the freedom of choice and recommends rearranging the placement of the food in order to sway students into choosing the more nutritious option. This could be as simple as placing the white milk in front of flavored milk. Rather than eliminating the flavored milk, adjusting the set-up will influence more students to grab the white milk because it is right in front of them and more convenient. This small change in the lunch line is proven to be effective, and it costs nothing.

What Are Some Smarter Lunchrooms Strategies?

The Smarter Lunchroom has accumulated 60 easy and low-cost strategies that will effectively promote healthy eating in lunchrooms. One strategy is to offer at least two kinds of fruits, some of which should be sliced or cut up. This tactic exposes students to a wider variety of fruit and allows for convenience. Another strategy includes highlighting the salad. Research has proven that salad bars in schools increase children’s consumption and are a great option for meeting meal requirements, such as serving a variety of different vegetables. Some strategies go beyond changing the menu, and explore how the lunchroom atmosphere can change the kids’ perceptions. For example, attractive and healthful food posters displayed in dining and service areas encourages students to try, select, and enjoy the healthy food options. The more strategies implemented, the more improvements in revenue, participation, and healthy eating will be seen.

What Are We Doing To Help?

FCHS works with schools throughout the state by providing technical assistance and education to help schools make healthy changes

throughout the school. By utilizing the 6 principles of behavioral economics, we help schools assess opportunities to guide students to healthier food choices. Many of the FCHS Department’s faculty and staff are certified in Smarter Lunchrooms implementation strategies.

What You Can Do: Join the Movement

Over 29,000 schools are currently implementing Smarter Lunchrooms strategies. To get started, Food Service Directors have the opportunity to receive training on Smarter Lunchrooms. Studies show that 94% of directors make changes in their cafeteria as a result of their training. Lunchroom staff should also receive training so that they understand what changes are being made to the cafeteria and what they can do to help. They also need to be aware of how they should talk to students and encourage them to eat healthy without sounding forceful. Contact your local FCHS office for training and technical support <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/personnel/unit.php?id=fchs&p=fac>.

For More Information:

The Smarter Lunchroom strategies: <https://www.smarterlunchrooms.org/scorecard-tools/smarter-lunchrooms-strategies>

Asparagus: A Delicious and Versatile Veggie



Karen Ensle EdD, RDN, FAND, CFCS, Preceptor & FCHS Educator, Union County

Asparagus, officially known as *Asparagus officinalis*, is a member of the lily family. This popular vegetable comes in a variety of colors, including green, white and purple. It's used in dishes around the world, including frittatas, pastas and stir-fries. Asparagus is also low in calories and packed with essential vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.

Asparagus is an excellent source of vitamin K, an essential nutrient involved in blood clotting and bone health. In addition, asparagus is high in folate, a nutrient that is vital for a healthy pregnancy and many important processes in the body, including cell growth and DNA formation. Asparagus is a low-calorie vegetable that is an excellent source of essential vitamins and minerals, especially folate and vitamins A, C and K.

A Good Source of Antioxidants

Antioxidants are compounds that help protect your cells from the harmful effects of free radicals and oxidative stress. Oxidative stress contributes to aging, chronic inflammation and many diseases, including cancer.

Asparagus, like other green vegetables, is high in antioxidants. These include vitamin E, vitamin C and glutathione, as well as, various flavonoids and polyphenols. Asparagus is particularly high in the flavonoids; quercetin, isorhamnetin and kaempferol. These substances have been found to have blood pressure-lowering, anti-inflammatory, antiviral and anticancer effects in a number of human, test-tube and animal studies. Purple asparagus contains powerful pigments called anthocyanins, which give the vegetable its vibrant color and have antioxidant effects in the body as well. In fact, increasing anthocyanin intake has been shown to reduce blood pressure and the risk of heart attacks.

A Vegetable that Can Improve Digestive Health

Dietary fiber is essential for good digestive health. Just half a cup of asparagus contains 1.8 grams. Studies suggest that a diet high in fiber-rich fruits and vegetables may help reduce the risk of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease and diabetes.

Asparagus is particularly high in insoluble fiber which adds bulk to your stool and supports regular bowel movements. Asparagus contains small amounts of soluble fiber which dissolves and forms a gel-like substance in the digestive tract. Soluble fiber feeds the friendly bacteria in the gut, such as *Bifidobacteria* and *Lactobacillus*. Increasing the number of beneficial bacteria in the gut, strengthens the immune system and produces essential vitamins B12 and K.

Folate Helps Support a Healthy Pregnancy

Asparagus is an excellent source of folate. One half cup of asparagus provides adults with 34% of their daily folate needs. This essential nutrient helps form red blood cells and produces DNA for healthy growth and development. It is a critical nutrient during the early stages of pregnancy and ensures the healthy development of the baby. Getting enough folate from asparagus, green leafy vegetables and fruit can protect against neural tube defects, including spina bifida.

Potassium Helps to Lower Blood Pressure

High blood pressure affects more than 1.3 billion people worldwide and is a major risk factor of heart disease and stroke. Research suggests that increasing potassium intake while reducing salt intake is an effective way to lower high blood pressure. Potassium lowers blood pressure in two ways: by relaxing the walls of blood vessels and excreting excess salt through urine. Asparagus is a good source of potassium, providing 6% of daily requirements in a half-cup serving.

Asparagus is Easy to Add to Your Diet

Asparagus is delicious and easy to incorporate into your diet. It can be cooked in a variety of ways, including boiling, grilling, steaming, roasting and sautéing. You can purchase it fresh, frozen or canned. Asparagus can be used in a number of dishes like salads, stir-fries, frittatas, omelets, pastas, and it makes an excellent side dish. It's affordable and widely available at grocery stores and farm markets May – June in New Jersey. When shopping for fresh asparagus, look for firm stems and tight, closed tips. Try this recipe.



ROASTED ASPARAGUS WITH PECANS

25 min-Yield: 4

Ingredients:

- 1 bunch asparagus
- 2 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- Pinch of Salt
- 1 cup pecan halves, chopped

Method:

- 1) Wash asparagus and pat dry with paper towel.
- 2) Place in plastic bag with olive oil, coat well. Chop pecans.
- 3) Place asparagus on baking sheet and sprinkle pecans on top.
- 4) Roast in 450 degree oven for 8-10 minutes or when asparagus is tender but not mushy.

Recipe from Karen Ensle's Collection



production and in turn stimulate the central nervous system, which may help dampen the effects of chronic stress in the body. Rhodiola is commonly used as an extract in supplement form and in combination with other herbs as a source of energy.

◆ **Mushrooms:** Cordyceps, reishi, chaga, and lion's mane are some of the many antioxidant-rich functional mushrooms with the potential to increase energy, boost the immune system, and reduce stress. Cordyceps are thought to decrease fatigue, increase physical endurance, and protect skin against UV damage. Reishi may be able to enhance immune response in addition to its antioxidant properties. Chaga are one of the richest sources of antioxidants in nature and are commonly used to reduce inflammation and boost immunity. Lion's mane is used to improve cognitive performance, specifically learning and memory ability.

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