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**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Health Headlines

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April Showers Bring May Flowers...and Spring Produce!!
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BRONX, NY – Affordable, fresh, healthful, tasty, good for the environment - what else can you ask for from a food? Seasonal fruits and vegetables are great options for all of these reasons and more. This spring, change up your normal routine and add fresh, colorful and delicious produce to your plate! By doing so, not only will you improve your health, but you will also save money, support your local economy and reduce your carbon footprint.

Spring Fruit and Vegetable 411

Picture this: a hefty plate of crisp arugula with sliced strawberries, radishes and peppers,

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topped with ¼ cup of raw sliced almonds and balsamic vinegar. Is your mouth watering? All of the ingredients in this meal are loaded with nutrients like fiber, vitamins A, C, folate, and even calcium, which will nourish your body, leave you feeling satisfied and good about your decision. Not to mention, all of the fruits and veggies in this meal are spring bloomers.

In the mood for something hot? Try baking asparagus stalks with garlic, pepper, a drizzle of olive oil until crisp. Plate them over a cup of quinoa or brown rice mixed with sautéed peppers, green onions and white beans for a meal loaded with seasonal vegetables, nutrients like potassium, vitamins A, C, and B and protein!

Here is a list and some information about some of the produce that spring has to offer:

- **Artichokes-** Artichokes are an excellent source of fiber and vitamin C and a good source of folate and magnesium. To prepare an artichoke steam, boil, microwave or sauté it until tender or until the petal near the center pulls out easily.
- **Arugula-**Arugula can add variety and flavor to you salads. It is a good source of vitamins A, C, folate, calcium and magnesium. Sauté it in olive oil or make it into a pesto sauce!
- **Asparagus**-Asparagus is a good source of potassium, fiber, vitamin B6, A, C and thiamin. Steam or boil until tender, or bake in the oven brushed with garlic and olive oil for more of a crunch.
- **Strawberries-** Strawberries are very high in vitamin C and other powerful antioxidants. They are available in the late spring (beginning in May). Buy frozen strawberries or freeze your own fresh ones for a cool and less perishable treat.
- **Radishes-**Radishes are rich in vitamin C, folic acid, potassium, B6 and calcium and only contain 20 calories per cup. They add great color and crunch to your favorite salads or cole slaw.

Burn Those Calories-Not Your Wallet

Seasonal foods are also cheaper. Think about the law of supply and demand. When a food comes into season and hundreds of pounds of crops are harvested, the price goes down. Not only are you doing something good for your health, but you are also doing something good for your bank account!

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Livin' La Vida Local

Get to know where your food comes from. The term "food miles" describes how far your food has to "travel" from the time the raw ingredients are harvested until it gets to your plate. According to Holly Hill at the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, processed food travels an average of 1,300 miles while fresh produce travels 1,500.[1] By visiting your local farmer's market, not only can you buy the freshest seasonal produce and support your local economy, but you can also cut down on your carbon footprint. Go to http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/FARMERSMARKETS to find a farmer's market closest to you.

Spring Into Action

This spring, besides just doing your regular spring cleaning, focus on what you can do to improve yourself, your well-being and your health. Incorporate seasonal produce for a plethora of fresh, colorful and healthful options that you can feel good about. Remember, small changes make a big difference. The time to start is now!

For more information related to this story or the James J. Peters VA Medical Center, please contact Jim Connell, Public Affairs Officer, at 718.584.9000, Ext. 6620.

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