

# Naturally Nutritious

BLOG #9

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## SAVORING SPINACH

When I was little, I grew up hearing, “Eat your spinach! Don’t you want to be strong like Popeye?” While the image of Popeye squeezing a couple of cans of spinach into his mouth and instantly growing massive muscles was enough to convince me, I’ve found plenty more practical and realistic reasons for enjoying the leafy green as I’ve gotten older.



*Spinach is packed with vitamins, nutrients, and fiber, which are essential for overall health. Moreover, studies have shown that spinach supports brain and mental health.*

Baby spinach is an ingredient I almost always have in my fridge. It’s relatively inexpensive and is clean and ready to be eaten raw or cooked. Spinach is in its peak season this time of year, and you can do so much more with spinach than you’d imagine.

Before diving into the creative ways you can add more spinach to your diet, let’s consider why spinach is beneficial to our well-being.

Eating spinach has been linked to slower age-related memory decline due to its high levels of folate, vitamin K, and antioxidants which protect brain cells from damage and may reduce the risk of chronic conditions like Alzheimer’s disease. Studies show diets rich in spinach and other leafy greens such as the Mediterranean or Japanese diet correlate with a 25 to 35 percent lower risk of depression when compared to a traditional Western diet. Studies also show that a higher dietary intake of foods containing folate, like spinach, may contribute to improved mental health and lower risks of depression and anxiety disorders.

If the health benefits of spinach have motivated you to eat more of the nutritious leafy green, I’d love to share some of the ways I add spinach to my meals.





At breakfast, I often sauté spinach for breakfast sandwiches of a whole egg and a thin slice of provolone on a whole grain English muffin. I add baby spinach to smoothies with almond milk, vanilla protein powder, frozen bananas, and any other fruit fresh or frozen I need to use. Spinach can be added to pancakes and chocolate muffins. Aside from salads, a handful of spinach in a whole grain wrap with turkey or chicken and light ranch dressing is a satisfying lunch. Chopped and sautéed spinach can be added to meatballs, meatloaf, or cooked couscous with feta cheese. If making homemade pesto, baby spinach helps to stretch basil to make a larger batch.

Whether it's sweet or savory, there are many ways to enjoy the brain and mental health benefits of a diet rich in spinach. While it is Mental Health Awareness Month, it is worth noting some of the additional nutritional benefits of consuming spinach.

Spinach is a good source of manganese, vitamin C, riboflavin, iron, magnesium, vitamin E, copper, potassium, and vitamin B6. The nutrients support heart health and kidney health and can support lower blood pressure. Spinach contains insoluble fiber which can help you feel fuller longer after eating it. Spinach is a good source of plant-based iron, better absorbed with an additional source of vitamin C. I hope you find some fun ways to add a little more of this green goodness to your diet as well!

If you're unsure if spinach is a food you'll enjoy, I highly recommend starting with my "Hulk Pancakes" as you won't even be able to taste the spinach in them. The sweetness from bananas and vanilla protein powder makes them taste like dessert, and you certainly can't go wrong with chocolate!

Note: Since everyone's health history and nutritional needs are so different, please make sure that you talk with your doctor and a registered dietitian to get advice about the diet and exercise plan that's right for you.





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# Hulk Pancakes

## INGREDIENTS

2 ½ cups milk of choice  
2 eggs  
2 ripe bananas  
4 scoops of vanilla protein powder  
2 cups of baby spinach  
3 cups of whole-grain pancake mix  
½ tsp of baking powder  
1 cup stevia-sweetened chocolate chips  
Avocado oil or oil spray

**Try this simple and easy spinach recipe that even my picky kids enjoy!**

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine milk, eggs, bananas, protein powder, and spinach in a blender until smooth.
2. Stir pancake mix and baking powder together. Add wet ingredients from the blender and gently fold the mixture together until there are no more dry patches.
3. Gently fold in chocolate chips.
4. Either with a spray bottle or a teaspoon, coat a non-stick pan with avocado oil and heat the oil over medium.
5. Using an ice cream scoop or ¼ cup measuring cup, portion pancakes onto a large pan, fitting 4 to 6 at a time. Flip pancakes over once when bubbles appear at the surface, cooking for an additional minute or two before transferring to a dish or a parchment-lined baking sheet.
6. Continue step 5 until all the batter has been cooked. This recipe makes a large batch of pancakes, leaving enough to cool and place in a container or Ziplock bag to keep in the freezer for quick healthy breakfasts.

*Parul*

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