

Those Amazing Colorful Fruits and Vegetables

by John Rizzo

As I'm growing older, I find myself a little more concerned about my eating habits. Make no mistake, I do not eliminate the unhealthy foods from my diet, but I try to create a balance with healthier foods. Fruits and vegetables are often the focus. There is so much benefit to eating these including vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants to name a few.

Enter beta-carotene. Beta-carotene is a red, orange-yellow pigment called a carotenoid that is sourced in plants and fruits, especially colorful vegetables. There is a common misnomer that only the red, yellow and orange fruits and vegetables contain beta-carotene. Green leafy vegetables are an excellent source as well; particularly spinach, swiss chard, turnip and beet greens, kale, and broccoli. The carotenoid pigments are dwarfed by the green chlorophyll.

So why is it important to have beta-carotene in your diet? Beta-carotene in itself is not an essential nutrient, but the human body converts it to vitamin A. And vitamin A helps maintain good eye health and vision, a strong immune system, healthy skin, mucus membranes and teeth. Beta-carotene is an antioxidant which protects cells from free radicals which can cause damage leading to chronic illnesses including heart disease and cancer.

In addition to the green leafy vegetables, other sources of beta-carotene are apricots, carrots, sweet potatoes, winter squash, cantaloupe, plums and pink grapefruit. Oh yeah, one more good source, pumpkin. Could this be the balance we are all looking for -a healthy and nutritious pie?

Apricot Chicken

Yield 4 servings

Flour	1/4 Cup	Soy Sauce	1 TBL
Cornstarch	1/4 Cup	Cider Vinegar	1/2 tsp
Boneless Chicken Breasts	1 1/4 lbs	Minced Garlic	1/2 tsp
Chicken Broth	1 Cup	Vegetable Oil for Cooking	
Apricot Preserves	3 TBL		

Use boneless and skinless chicken breasts, lightly flattened.

Combine the flour and cornstarch and lightly coat each chicken breast with the flour mixture.

Heat the oil to just below the smoking point and gently lay the breasts in the skillet and cook until lightly browned on both sides. Remove from the skillet and layer the breasts in a 9 inch baking pan that's at least 3 inches deep.

Add the chicken broth, apricot preserves, soy sauce, vinegar and garlic to the skillet. Let the mixture come to a slight boil while scraping any browned bits from the bottom

of the skillet.

Pour the mixture over the chicken breasts; cover with foil and bake at 325° F for approximately 30 minutes. Chicken must reach an internal temperature of 165° F.

Remove the chicken from the pan and arrange on a serving tray; cover to keep warm. Strain the cooking liquid into a small saucepan and bring to a light boil. The sauce should be a light syrupy consistency. If it's too thin, add a small amount of cornstarch (slurried with water) to the simmering mixture to reach the desired consistency. Cook on low heat for 5 additional minutes and remove from heat.