

Raw or Baked, Apples are Healthy to the Core

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The old English adage “An apple a day keeps the doctor away” is a wise saying anytime of the year but especially each fall. The fruit of the apple tree matures in autumn.

Archeologists have found evidence that humans have been enjoying apples since at least 6500 B.C. Apples come in a variety of shapes and sizes and all shades of reds, greens and yellows. In addition, the apple tree was one of the first trees to be universally cultivated. Can you believe that there are more than 7,500 cultivars of apples throughout the world with nearly 2500 cultivars grown in the United States alone? Apple cultivars are bred for specific reasons – mainly, to supply us with apples for fresh eating, cooking and juicing!

Apples are mostly eaten raw; the whole fruit including the skin is edible with the exception of the seeds which are slightly poisonous. Additionally, apples can be canned or juiced, baked, stewed, dried, made into apple butter or jelly, baby food and vinegar.

Purchase apples that are bruise-free and firm to the touch as bruised apples can decay quickly. Additionally, handle apples gently to prevent bruising. Unbruised apples, handled and stored well, have a storage life of 90 days, and often more! Optimally, apples should be kept at 35-40 degrees with relative humidity of 80-90%. For home storage this means keeping apples in the coldest part of the refrigerator.

Please remember to use the FDA recommended technique that works best to clean smooth skinned fruits. Rinse your fresh apple under running water. It is important to rinse food even if you are going to peel it. In addition, cut out bruised or damaged areas; bacteria can thrive there and dry produce with a clean cloth or paper towel to wipe off even more bacteria.

Sliced apples turn brown upon exposure to air. This can be prevented by treating sliced apples with acidulated water. (1 part lemon juice: 3 parts water)

What’s more, apples are a **nutrient dense food**. Apples are the perfect, portable snack: great tasting, energy-boosting, and free of fat. Just one apple can provide as much dietary fiber as a serving of bran cereal. Apples contain the essential trace element, boron, which has been shown to strengthen bones - a good defense against osteoporosis.

The next time you are shopping for fresh produce check out the abundant supply of fresh apples at your favorite market. Apples are exceptionally nutritious, very affordable and of the best quality this time of year. Plus, they taste good! You will be glad you did, and your body will be glad you did.

The Produce for a Better Health Foundation (<http://www.pbhfoundation.org/>) has a wealth of information available to help you add more fruit and vegetables to your diet. Check out these easy ways to add an apple or three to your day.

**Apple, Nut & Cheese Platter.** Slice your favorite *unpeeled* apple variety then drizzle with lemon juice (to prevent browning). Select your favorite cheeses: select your choice of nuts. Arrange apples, cheeses, and nuts on an attractive cheese platter. Enjoy as a light meal or an appetizer.

**Baked Apples.** Core Roma or Jonagold apples most of the way through (leave 1/2 inch on the bottom) and fill each with 1 tablespoon of brown sugar, 1 tablespoon of raisins, 1 tablespoon walnuts, a dash of cinnamon and top with 1/2 a teaspoon of salted butter. Place in a square baking dish and bake at 375° F for about 30 minutes.

**Apples & Salad.** Slice your favorite apple variety and toss with mixed greens, toasted pecans, dried fruit and a bit of cheese. Top with simple vinaigrette made with balsamic vinegar, extra virgin olive oil, salt and a drizzle of maple syrup.

If you have a question, write to Heidi Copeland, Extension Agent Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Florida/IFAS Extension--Leon County, 615 Paul Russell Road, Tallahassee, FL 32301-7099; or call the Extension Office 487-3006, between 8 a.m. to noon or 1 to 5 p.m. weekdays.

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