SALAD

A SALAD A DAY KEEPS THE KILOS AWAY

"I love salads and eat one every day. There's something about crunching into those leaves. When I spot a salad on the menu – like rocket, pear and walnut salad or a Vietnamese salad with mint and coriander – I always fall for it."

TRYING TO SLIM DOWN? START WITH A SALAD

If you eat out a lot or need to watch your weight, it's a good idea to order a salad with a simple vinaigrette style dressing as a first course. With its high fibre and water content, you can fill up with a huge plate and yet have eaten only 200 kilojoules (50 calories).

Dietitians call this a low kilojoule density – few kilojoules from a big volume. In contrast, chocolate has a high kilojoule density, packing a hefty 1110 kilojoules (265 calories) in a small 50 g bar. US researcher Dr Barbara Rolls, author of The Volumetrics Weight Control Plan (Harper Collins), says that by starting with a large salad as an entree, you feel fuller and eat less at that meal.

USE A DRESSING

Forget no-oil dressings! A little oil with a splash of vinegar or lemon juice makes certain nutrients more bio-available – which means that you absorb a lot more of the fat-soluble vitamins (such as beta-carotene) and antioxidants (lutein, lycopene) from raw foods. Plus their acidity slows down digestion and lowers the overall GI of the meal, so you feel fuller for longer and keep your blood glucose levels even.

MAKE YOUR OWN

Make your own dressing. It's quick and easy. Best of all, you choose a quality oil and you don't get the extra salt and additives from commercial salad dressings. Remember: most bought dressings are mainly WATER! The oil is mixed into the water with the help of emulsifiers and gums. But it makes your salad limp and watery.

MY EASY VINAIGRETTE (FRENCH DRESSING)

In a screw top jar, measure out 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, 1 tablespoon white or red wine vinegar (or lemon juice), ½ teaspoon Dijon mustard plus a few grinds of black pepper. Shake well until blended, drizzle over your salad, toss and serve.

MAKE YOUR OWN

WHAT'S IN MY DRESSING

Oil, Vinegar, Mustard and Pepper

WHAT'S IN A COMMERCIAL DRESSING

Water added, Vegetable oil, Antioxidant (320), Sugar, Vinegar, Salt, Food acid (330) Vegetable gums (407, 415, 440a), Flavour, Garlic and Colour (102)

10 GOOD HEALTHY REASONS TO EAT A SALAD A DAY

1 It is bursting with vitamins C, B1, B6, folate and K and antioxidants which are not destroyed by cooking.

2 It is packed with potassium, magnesium and other essential minerals that can counteract our high salt intake.

3 It fills you up without overloading you with kilojoules (so long as you go easy with creamy dressings), so helps you shed excess weight without going hungry.

4 It has little fat (watch the dressing) and heaps of fibre.

5 You can make it light and counteract a rich meal.

6 Or you can make is substantial by adding protein (can of salmon, chicken, hard-boiled egg) and starchy carbs for a meal in a bowl.

7 It is quick and easy to prepare – if you don't have one ingredient, just to substitute another.

8 It helps you get those 5 serves of vegetables and 2 serves of fruit each day.

9 It's good in hot weather when you don't feel like cooking; or you can make a warm salad for winter with roasted veggies.

10 It's the perfect meal to build around what's fresh and in season from tomato with basil in summer to a wintry cole slaw.

GO FOR DARK GREEN!
Raw salad leaves are blessed with dozens of phyto-chemicals, natural plant compounds that act as antioxidants to protect the body and slow the ageing process. To get the most antioxidants, select dark leafy greens or reds such as: dark oak leaf, mignonette, radicchio, coral, baby spinach leaves, rocket, parsley, basil, mint, coriander and other fresh herbs.

A tossed leaf salad is a great way to make any meal – even pizza or fish and chips - more balanced. It's the perfect antidote to the average Western diet.

Produced by accredited nutritionist Catherine Saxelby to help busy people eat better and look after their health. Find tips and quick recipes at her website.