

# \*feel- good FOODS

Vegetarians are happier people, but don't take our word for it. A study published in *Nutrition Journal* in June 2010 followed 138 Seventh Day Adventists in the Southwest, 60 of them vegetarians. This religious group is often studied because about half its membership follows a strict vegetarian diet.

The volunteers completed questionnaires about their daily eating habits and mood states, including levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. The result? The vegetarians scored significantly better on mood scales than their omnivorous peers.

Besides eschewing meat, what were they doing right? "They consumed generous plant sources of both omega types of essential fatty acids, such as nuts and seeds," says the study's lead researcher, Bonnie Beezhold, PhD,

MHS, of Arizona State University. "Not consuming the long-chain omega-6 fats, which are abundant in animal flesh and compete with omega-3s in the body, may be a factor."

It appears that what's inside your meals—and the amount—can go a long way to keeping you on an even keel. Here's a look at the top mood-boosting nutrients for vegetarians and where to get them, plus a collection of tasty recipes that keep the calories low and the feel-good factor high.

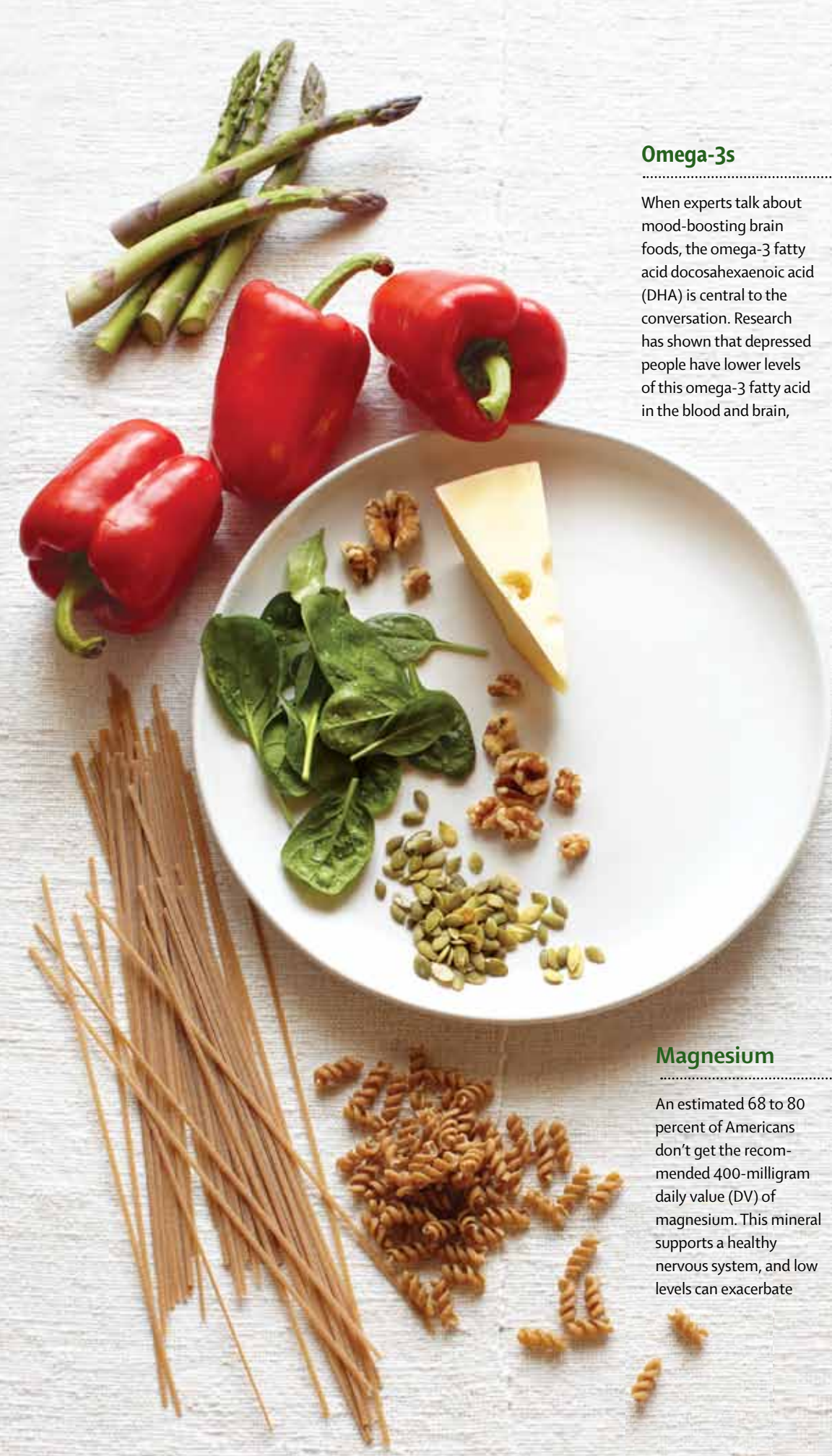
BY Matthew Solan  
RECIPES BY Mary Margaret Chappell

## LIGHTEN UP (literally!) with low-calorie dishes rich in mood-boosting nutrients



Roasted Red Pepper Pita Pizzas, p. 71

PHOTOGRAPHY Victoria Pearson FOOD STYLING Rori Trovato PROP STYLING Jennifer Flanagan



## Omega-3s

When experts talk about mood-boosting brain foods, the omega-3 fatty acid docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) is central to the conversation. Research has shown that depressed people have lower levels of this omega-3 fatty acid in the blood and brain,

**\* THERE ARE PLENTY OF NON-FISHY WAYS TO GET YOUR OMEGAS.**

says Elizabeth Somer, MA, RD, author of *Eat Your Way to Happiness*.

Because DHA is found mostly in fish or fish oil, vegetarians rely on alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), the omega-3 in plant foods, which the body converts to DHA. To get enough ALA to convert into optimal quantities of DHA, vegetarians should aim for 1,800 to 4,400 milligrams daily.

**SERVE IT UP:** A single teaspoon of flaxseed oil contains 2,400 milligrams ALA; ¼ cup walnuts: 2,270 milligrams; 1 Tbs. canola oil: 1,200 milligrams. Soy milks and soy yogurts fortified with algae-derived DHA are also available.

## Magnesium

An estimated 68 to 80 percent of Americans don't get the recommended 400-milligram daily value (DV) of magnesium. This mineral supports a healthy nervous system, and low levels can exacerbate

common symptoms of depression, such as anxiety, confusion, and low energy.

**SERVE IT UP:** Boost magnesium with pumpkin seeds (a 2-ounce serving packs 45 percent of the DV) or deep-green leafy veggies such as spinach (1 cup provides nearly 40 percent of the DV).

## Tryptophan

The amino acid tryptophan is a precursor to serotonin, sometimes called the feel-good neurotransmitter. "Serotonin regulates nerve function, and low levels can trigger disorders like depression and anxiety," says Somer. Tryptophan is found in such protein-rich foods as tofu, milk,

**HIGH-QUALITY CARBS ACTIVATE TRYPTOPHAN'S FEEL-GOOD POWERS.** \*

and cheese, but the protein in these foods can block tryptophan from entering the brain. Your body banks the tryptophan, and needs a modest dose of carbs (no more than 30 grams) to activate serotonin production. **SERVE IT UP:** Good sources of bankable tryptophan include 4 ounces of tofu or 1 ounce of mozzarella cheese. To rev up your body's serotonin production, dig into a small serving of pure carbs, such as ½ cup of cooked whole-grain pasta, brown rice, or bulgur wheat.

## Folic Acid

Also called folate or folacin, folic acid is a B-complex vitamin known as the baby vitamin because it helps prevent birth defects. But it may also influence how often you experience good moods. A 2008 study in *Public Health Nutrition* found high concentrations of folate were associated with less negative mood in 58 healthy men ages 19 to 47. How folic acid creates happy feelings is layered: it is active in producing neurotransmitters, such

**EAT LENTILS, ASPARAGUS, AND SPINACH TO GET YOUR FILL OF BRAIN-FRIENDLY FOLIC ACID.** \*

as serotonin, and also helps reduce blood levels of homocysteine, too much of which can damage brain cells. **SERVE IT UP:** You can get 45 percent of the DV of folic acid (400 micrograms) from just ½ cup of cooked lentils and 33 percent of the DV from ½ cup cooked asparagus or spinach.



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## Vitamins C and E

When free radicals go unchecked, they can accelerate brain aging and dementia, says Somer. "Antioxidants neutralize free radicals that otherwise would pierce delicate membranes in the brain and cause cell damage," she says. You can't stop free radical damage—it's a natural process—but you can lessen the effects by keeping your body well supplied with antioxidants such as vitamins C and E.

**SERVE IT UP:** Your choices go well beyond the orange tree. For instance, 1 cup of chopped red bell peppers offers a whopping 291 percent of the DV of vitamin C. (An orange has just 116 percent of the DV.) Even 1 cup of strawberries has more C than an orange. For a vitamin C and E combo, go green with 1 cup of spinach or mustard or collard greens.

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## Spicy Asian Spinach Salad with Toasted Pumpkin Seeds

SERVES 4 | 30 MINUTES OR FEWER

One serving of this crunchy salad provides more than half the recommended DV of magnesium. To make it vegan, simply replace the eggs with 4 ounces of chopped baked tofu.

### SALAD

- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 4 cups baby spinach leaves
- 1 cup bean sprouts
- 1 cup grated carrots
- ½ cup toasted unsalted pumpkin seeds or pepitas
- 2 green onions, chopped (¼ cup)
- ¼ cup thinly sliced fresh mint leaves

### DRESSING


- 1 Tbs. lime juice
- 1 Tbs. canola oil
- ½ tsp. sriracha chile sauce
- ¼ tsp. grated fresh ginger

**1.** To make Salad: Coat small skillet with cooking spray, and heat over medium heat. Pour eggs in skillet, and cook 2 to 3 minutes, or until firmly set. Transfer omelet to cutting board to cool.

**2.** Stack 5 or 6 spinach leaves, and roll stack lengthwise into tight cylinder. Cut crosswise in fine slices. Repeat with remaining spinach leaves. Transfer to large bowl, and set aside.

**3.** To make Dressing: Whisk together all ingredients in small bowl. Season with salt and pepper, if desired.

**4.** Chop omelet into ½-inch pieces. Add to spinach in bowl along with bean sprouts, carrots, pumpkin seeds, green onions, and mint leaves. Add Dressing, and toss to coat.

PER 1½-CUP SERVING: 187 CAL; 9 G PROT; 14 G TOTAL FAT (2 G SAT FAT); 10 G CARB; 106 MG CHOL; 111 MG SOD; 4 G FIBER; 3 G SUGARS 

## Walnut-Stuffed Mushrooms

SERVES 4 | 30 MINUTES OR FEWER

Four of these omega-3-packed bites served over grains makes a great supper.

- 1 cup walnut halves, plus 16 more for garnish
- ¼ cup chopped parsley
- 1 clove garlic, peeled
- ½ cup cooked brown lentils
- 4 tsp. balsamic vinegar, divided
- 1 tsp. dried rubbed sage
- 1 tsp. toasted walnut oil
- 16 large button mushrooms (2-inch diameter), stems removed
- 1 Tbs. olive oil
- ½ cup low-sodium vegetable broth



**1.** Purée 1 cup walnuts with parsley and garlic in food processor until thick and pasty. Add lentils, 2 tsp. vinegar, sage, and walnut oil; purée until smooth. Season with salt and pepper, if desired.





WALNUTS AND FORTIFIED SOY FOODS ARE EXCELLENT SOURCES OF ALA, A PLANT-BASED OMEGA-3 FATTY ACID THAT THE BODY CONVERTS TO MOOD-BOOSTING DHA.

**2.** Fill each mushroom cap with 1½ Tbs. walnut mixture, and press remaining walnut halves into filling. Place on plate.

**3.** Heat olive oil in large skillet over medium-high heat. Add mushrooms, round side down, and cook 5 minutes, or until mushrooms begin to release their juices and brown on bottom, shaking pan occasionally. Carefully add broth to pan, cover, and reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer 10 to 15 minutes, or until mushrooms are tender and filling has puffed and browned slightly. Remove mushrooms from pan, then add remaining 2 tsp. vinegar to pan. Simmer 1 to 2 minutes, or until sauce thickens slightly. Serve mushrooms drizzled with sauce.

PER SERVING (4 STUFFED MUSHROOMS): 314 CAL; 10 G PROT; 27 G TOTAL FAT (3 G SAT FAT); 14 G CARB; 0 MG CHOL; 85 MG SOD; 5 G FIBER; 4 G SUGARS  

3 to 4 minutes, or until beginning to brown. Stir in garlic, curry powder, and ginger, and sauté 1 minute, or until curry powder darkens. Add spinach and 2 Tbs. water, and cook 1 minute, or until most of water has evaporated. Remove from heat, and stir in yogurt and soymilk, if using, or ¼ cup water. Fold in tofu cubes.

PER 1-CUP SERVING: 157 CAL; 10 G PROT; 8 G TOTAL FAT (<1 G SAT FAT); 14 G CARB; 0 MG CHOL; 62 MG SOD; 4 G FIBER; 5 G SUGARS  

## Roasted Red Pepper Pita Pizzas

SERVES 4 | 30 MINUTES OR FEWER

Jarred roasted red peppers create a speedy homemade sauce for these mini pizzas, but you can also roast your own red peppers to cut down on sodium. The mozzarella topping puts a deposit in your tryptophan account.

- 1 cup jarred roasted red peppers, rinsed and drained (2 large peppers), plus more for garnishing pizzas, if desired
- 6 oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, drained, plus 1 Tbs. oil
- 2 6½-inch whole-wheat pita rounds, split apart to make 4 thin rounds
- Dried oregano, for sprinkling
- ¼ lb. (1 ball) fresh mozzarella cheese, drained and thinly sliced
- 16 small fresh basil leaves

**1.** Preheat oven to broil. Purée red peppers and sun-dried tomatoes and their oil in food processor 1 to 2 minutes, or until smooth.

**2.** Place pita rounds on baking sheet. Spread ¼ cup red pepper sauce on cut side of each pita. Sprinkle with oregano, then top with mozzarella and garnish with sliced red peppers, if desired. Broil 3 to 5 minutes, or until cheese is melted and bubbly. Scatter basil leaves over pizzas, and serve immediately.

PER PIZZA: 193 CAL; 8 G PROT; 11 G TOTAL FAT (4 G SAT FAT); 18 G CARB; 22 MG CHOL; 313 MG SOD; 3 G FIBER; 2 G SUGARS

## Tahini-Roasted Broccoli over Raisin-Studded Bulgur

SERVES 4 | 30 MINUTES OR FEWER

Tahini, a Middle-Eastern sesame seed paste, adds protein and flavor to this meal of whole grains and roasted veggies.

### BROCCOLI

- 1½ lb. broccoli, trimmed and cut into florets (6 cups)
- 1 Tbs. olive oil

### BULGUR

- 1½ cups low-sodium vegetable broth
- 1 cup bulgur
- ¼ cup raisins or dried currants
- 1 Tbs. tomato paste


### TAHINI SAUCE

- 1 tsp. olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced (2 tsp.)
- 2 Tbs. tahini
- 1 Tbs. lemon juice

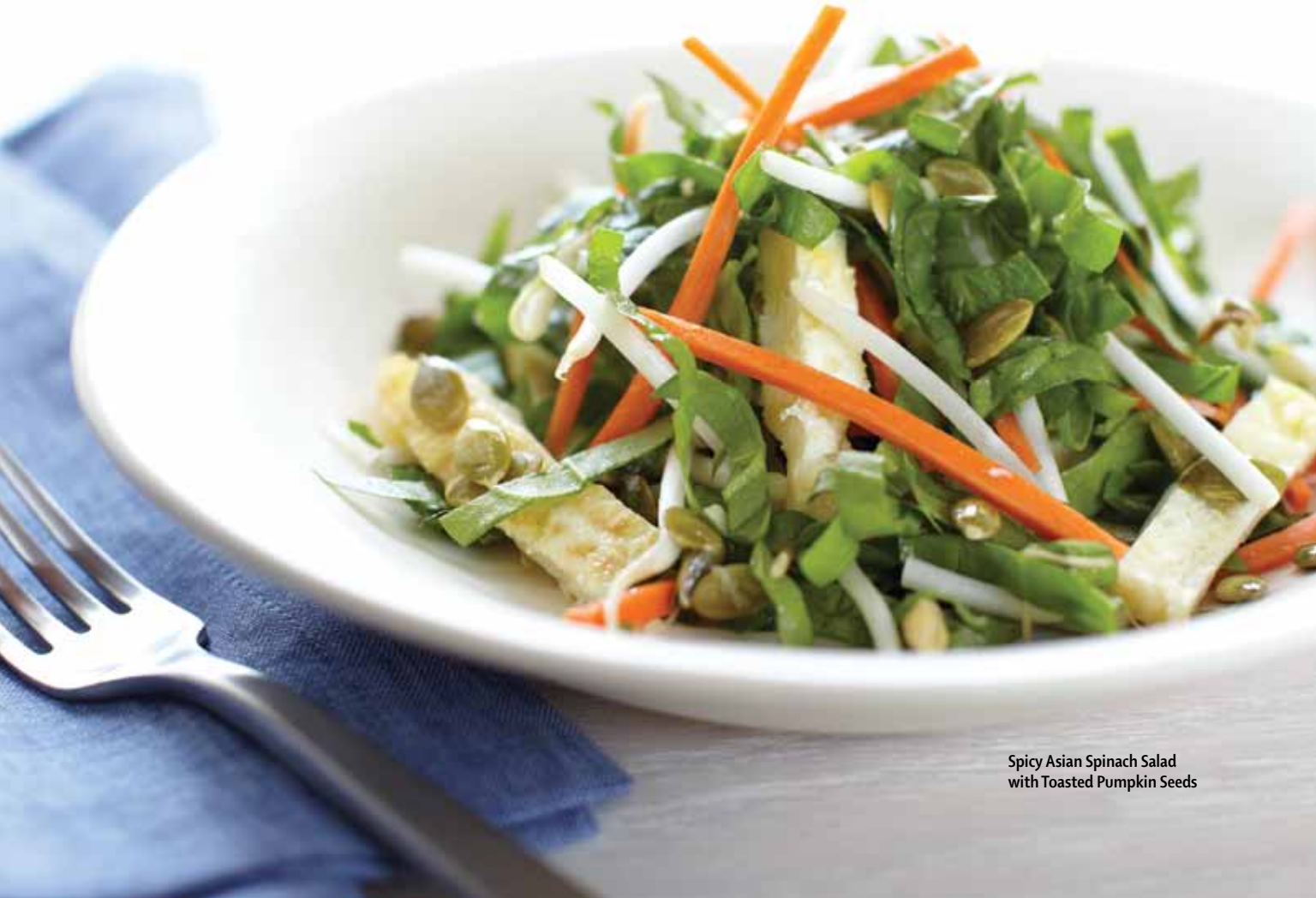
**1.** Preheat oven to 450°F. To make Broccoli: Toss together broccoli and oil in large bowl. Season with salt and pepper, if desired. Spread on baking sheet, and roast 10 to 15 minutes, or until florets begin to brown, shaking pan occasionally.

**2.** Meanwhile, to make Bulgur: Combine broth, bulgur, raisins, and tomato paste in medium saucepan, and bring to a boil over medium heat. Cover, and simmer 15 minutes, or until all liquid is absorbed and bulgur is tender. Remove from heat, and keep warm.

**3.** To make Tahini Sauce: Heat oil in saucepan over medium heat. Add garlic, and sauté 1 minute, or until fragrant. Stir in tahini and ½ cup water; reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer 1 to 2 minutes, or until sauce begins to thicken. Remove from heat, and stir in lemon juice. Toss hot Broccoli with Tahini Sauce in large bowl. Serve Broccoli over Bulgur.

PER SERVING (½ CUP BULGUR PLUS 1 CUP BROCCOLI): 279 CAL; 10 G PROT; 10 G TOTAL FAT (1 G SAT FAT); 44 G CARB; 0 MG CHOL; 118 MG SOD; 11 G FIBER; 8 G SUGARS 

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Spicy Asian Spinach Salad with Toasted Pumpkin Seeds



Goat Cheese–Asparagus  
Crustless Quiche

Continued from p. 71

### Goat Cheese–Asparagus Crustless Quiche

SERVES 4 | 30 MINUTES OR FEWER

For a pretty presentation, reserve a few asparagus tips to steam and use as a garnish for this quick supper dish. Fresh out of asparagus? Substitute broccoli florets—they're also rich in folic acid.

- 1 lb. asparagus, trimmed and cut into 1-inch lengths, tips reserved for garnish, optional
- 1 tsp. olive oil
- 2 large shallots
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled
- 5 oz. fresh goat cheese
- 2 large eggs
- 5 large egg whites

1. Coat 4 ramekins or a 9-inch-square baking pan with cooking spray. Toss asparagus in oil in bowl, and season with salt and pepper, if desired. Place ramekins in oven, and preheat oven to 425°F.

2. Meanwhile, place shallots and garlic in bowl of food processor, and process until finely minced. Add goat cheese, and process until creamy; then add eggs and egg whites, and purée until smooth. Season with salt and pepper, if desired.

3. Pour egg mixture over asparagus in ramekins once oven is preheated, stirring to evenly distribute vegetables. Bake 15 minutes, or until tops are light brown and tester inserted in centers comes out clean. Garnish with asparagus tips, if using.

PER SERVING: 186 CAL; 16 G PROT; 11 G TOTAL FAT (6 G SAT FAT); 6 G CARB; 122 MG CHOL; 244 MG SOD; 1 G FIBER; 2 G SUGARS

### Vadouvan-Spiced Red Lentil Soup

SERVES 4 | 30 MINUTES OR FEWER

Vadouvan, a French-Indian spice blend similar to curry powder or garam masala, is used here to season a thick, satisfying protein- and folate-packed lentil soup.

- 1 Tbs. olive oil
- 1 large leek, white and pale-green parts quartered and chopped (1½ cups)

- 2 cloves garlic, minced (2 tsp.)
- 1 tsp. vadouvan spice powder or garam masala
- 2 cups chopped tomatoes, or 1 15-oz. can chopped tomatoes
- ½ cup red lentils
- ¼ cup quinoa
- 2 sprigs thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 Tbs. lemon juice
- Fresh parsley for garnish, optional

Heat oil in large saucepan over medium heat. Add leek, and sauté 2 to 3 minutes, or until softened. Stir in garlic and vadouvan spice powder. Add tomatoes, lentils, quinoa, thyme, bay leaf, and 6 cups water. Season with salt and pepper (if desired) cover, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium low, and simmer 20 minutes, or until lentils are soft. Stir in lemon juice and parsley (if using) just before serving.

PER 1½-CUP SERVING: 197 CAL; 10 G PROT; 5 G TOTAL FAT (<1 G SAT FAT); 31 G CARB; 0 MG CHOL; 16 MG SOD; 6 G FIBER; 5 G SUGARS

### Strawberry-Balsamic Chutney

SERVES 4 | 30 MINUTES OR FEWER

This sweet-and-sour condiment is loaded with vitamin C and goes with just about anything. Make a big batch to keep in the fridge to serve over steamed veggies or whole grains.

- 2 tsp. honey
- 2 cups fresh or frozen and thawed strawberries, halved
- 1 Tbs. balsamic vinegar
- 2 green onions, chopped (¼ cup)

Warm honey in skillet over medium-high heat until liquid. Add strawberries, and cook 10 minutes, or until strawberries are shrunken and soft, but still whole, and liquid is sauce-like. Stir in balsamic vinegar, and cook 2 to 3 minutes, or until sauce is thick. Remove from heat, stir in green onions, and season with salt and pepper, if desired.

PER ¼-CUP SERVING: 42 CAL; <1 G PROT; <1 G TOTAL FAT (<1 G SAT FAT); 10 G CARB; 0 MG CHOL; 2 MG SOD; 2 G FIBER; 8 G SUGARS

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROMULO YANES; FOOD STYLING: MAGGIE RUGGIERO; PROP STYLING: MARY-ELLEN WEINRIB