


The Home Extension Line

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A Yogurt A Day Keeps the Doctor Away

Just the mention of bacteria today triggers many to reach for their hand sanitizer.

Some are surprised to hear that there are types of bacteria which can provide a benefit to our body. In fact our digestive tract is home to hundreds of different healthy bacteria that help us to fight off infection, absorb vitamins and even prevent diarrhea.

At birth we have a relatively sterile digestive system, however within three to four weeks most infants have a thriving healthy 'flora' of micro-organisms that increases and changes as we grow.

If you have ever taken an antibiotic you may have noticed the absence of these bacterial friends. Many broad-spectrum antibiotics don't differentiate between the good and bad bacteria. Therefore you end up with less healthy bacteria in the digestive system and many experience a side effect of diarrhea.

The good news is that you can help the body replace the good bacteria by eating yogurt. Yogurt is made by adding healthy bacteria to milk. If you look closely at the label of any good brand of yogurt you will see the statement 'live bacterial cultures'. These bacteria are able to survive the acid environment of the stomach and find a home in the lower digestive system.

The bacteria reduce the pH of the gut and create a more acid environment, which has many positive side effects.

Greater acidity kills off many unhealthy bacteria, stimulates immune function and aids in the absorption of many nutrients such as calcium and magnesium.

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Yogurt (continued)

The bacteria in yogurt also help to break down the lactose in milk products which makes it a perfect dairy source for those with lactose intolerance. Yogurt is also high in calcium and a good source of protein.

The trick is to find a brand of yogurt without too much fat and added sugar.

Adults should look for varieties that are under two percent M.F. (Check on the label for M.F. which stands for Milk Fat). For kids, higher fat is fine, however give preference to brands sweetened with fruit rather than sugar.

One of the best ways to consume yogurt is to buy plain and add your own fresh fruit. If you find the taste of plain yogurt too sour, try varieties that are lactose-reduced. The more lactose is broken down, the sweeter the yogurt. A favorite snack is a bowl of plain yogurt mixed with chopped fresh orange segments and sunflower seeds. Also try this with fresh peaches and walnuts.

There are endless uses for plain yogurt if you keep a tub at hand. A dollop of plain yogurt in a hot soup or spicy curry will cool the heat. It works as a great marinade for chicken or fish when mixed with your favorite spices.

You can use yogurt to dilute the fats in dishes made with mayonnaise or sour cream. For example, when making tuna salad, egg salad or potato salad, add plain yogurt and cut back on the mayonnaise.

You can even extend your favorite creamy dip by adding up to half plain yogurt. Remember that this will reduce the fat in addition to adding calcium, protein and healthy bacteria. Next time you are grocery-shopping throw in an extra tub of yogurt. Perhaps the new saying will be 'a yogurt a day - keeps the doctor away.'

Source: Heidi Smith Registered Dietician, Author of “Nutrition for the Long Run”, www.heidismithnutrition.com

A New Prescription for Pain: Sunlight

For hospital patients recovering from surgery, sunlight appears to be therapeutic. The discovery was made by investigators at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center who assigned 89 spinal surgery patients either to rooms that received a lot of natural light or to dim rooms.

On the day after surgery, patients in the brighter rooms took significantly less pain medication than patients in darker rooms, and they continued to take lower amounts throughout their entire hospital stay. People who were exposed to more sunlight also reported experiencing less stress on questionnaires completed the day after surgery and on the day of discharge.

The reason for the link between sunlight and reduced pain may have to do with serotonin, a mood-regulating chemical in the brain. When levels of serotonin are too low, depression can occur, and depression increases the perception of pain, explains Bruce Rabin, MD, PhD, one of the study's authors. But sunlight may elevate serotonin levels, he suggests, thereby boosting mood and lessening pain perception.

Source: Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter, May 2004

Eating Better for a Healthy Planet

Sustainable food choices for you and your family!

- 1. Go organic!** Choosing organically produced foods and products is one of the most important things you can do for the planet. Organic farming is a sustainable form of land management which uses compost and manure as fertilizers and natural controls instead of pesticides. Organic food not only reduces pollution — it is also healthier for you and your family. Eating organic reduces your risk of exposure to cancer-causing pesticides and increases your intake of nutrients and minerals. In Sarasota County, there are many natural foods stores and supermarket chains that offer organic products.
- 2. Buy local.** Supporting your local farmer is the next step in food choice sustainability. Buying locally produced foods promotes a thriving local economy and reduces the environmental impact of shipping and storage. Plus, you get to know the people who tend the land and grow the food you eat everyday. Farmer's markets and roadside stands are the best place to find local foods, although these may not always be organic. Many natural foods stores also carry locally grown food — just ask!
- 3. Eat your veggies.** If you want to truly reduce your footprint on the planet, strive to eat more fruits and vegetables and less meat. Livestock production is one of the leading causes of tropical rainforest removal and soil erosion. There are many delicious vegetarian options that are beneficial for your health and the environment.
- 4. Join a food-buying cooperative.** Save money, support local farms, and bond with other sustainably minded folks by joining a food-buying cooperative. Members pool their money to purchase fresh produce and bulk foods at wholesale prices. If there are no cooperatives available in your area, you can start one by contacting Global Organics Distributors.
- 5. Learn to love the simplicity of home cooking.** Every meal that you prepare at home saves resources that would be used to prepare, serve and package that meal in a store, deli or restaurant. Eating freshly cooked foods is a healthy alternative to salty and fattening fast foods. Preparing large meals ahead of time and freezing individual portions can provide you with a healthy diet throughout the workweek.
- 6. Purchase fresh produce and bulk foods.** Eating fresh fruits and vegetables is the best way to preserve nutrients, plus fresh foods require much less energy and produce less waste than processed products such as frozen or canned goods. Grains, nuts and other dried foods can be bought in bulk to reduce packaging waste and costs.
- 7. Grow your own.** Ensure that the foods you eat are fresh, healthy and sustainable by harvesting them from your own backyard! Here in Florida we are blessed with a year-round growing season and there are many possibilities for container plants, home gardens and even edible landscaping.

Source: Sustainable Sarasota@scgov.net

Brain Facts

Babies are born with 100 billion brain cells and almost no neural connections. By age three, a baby's brain has formed about 1,000 trillion connections — about twice as many as adults have.

Brain activity in children ages three to ten is more than twice that of adult, and although new synapses continue to be formed throughout life, “never again will the brain be able to master new skills so readily or rebound from setbacks so easily.”

Experiences do not just influence a child's development; they allow the child to finish the work of building the unfinished brain. Three-quarters of the brain develops outside the womb, in direct relationship with the physical and social environment. Early experiences and interactions do not just create a context for early development and learning, they directly affect the way the brain is wired.

The brain is the ultimate example of the saying “use it or lose it!” Connections that are used repeatedly in the early years become permanent; those that are not are eliminated.

Children (and adults) learn best when they can actively make sense of their experience. Effective teaching builds on the experience and knowledge that children bring to school.

Effective teaching enables children to use all their senses and intelligences. Music, drama and arts have been linked to higher achievement in all areas. Physical movement juices up the brain, feeding it nutrients and increasing nerve connections — all of which makes it easier for children to learn.

Source: www.wicworks.ca.gov

Did You Know Kiwi Fruit

Kiwi fruit is a refreshing source of good nutrition. Ounce for ounce, kiwi fruit has more vitamin C than oranges, as much potassium as bananas, and four times as much fiber as celery. It contains no sodium, very little fat, and no cholesterol. Kiwi fruit is available year round. Like peaches, kiwi fruit is ripe when slightly soft to the touch. Choose fruit that is plump and unwrinkled. To ripen at home, place in a bowl with other fruit and leave at room temperature for a few days. For quick ripening, place kiwi fruit in a paper bag with apples or bananas. Kiwi can be eaten very simply right out of the hand or can complement any meal. Used as a beautiful garnish for salads or dessert plates, kiwis will also tenderize meats.

Source: FL Dept. of Agriculture

Tips for Travelers

Each year millions of Americans travel abroad for vacation or to visit friends and relatives. In 2000, approximately 60 million international passengers were departing by air from the United States annually; over a third traveled to developing countries, where the risk of contracting infectious diseases is increased. An estimated 50% of international travelers become ill as a result of their travels. In 2000, 1,021 of the cases of malaria reported to CDC were acquired abroad. Of the approximately 400 cases of typhoid fever each year in the U.S., 70% are acquired while traveling internationally. Most international travel-related health problems are preventable; however, travelers are often unaware of health risks, lack an understanding of the measures necessary to avoid them or both.

To prevent infectious diseases among international travelers, the Division of Global Migration and Quarantine (DGMQ) provides health-care providers and the public with current CDC health recommendations for international travel. These recommendations are available on the Travelers' Health website and as a textbook for health-care providers, "Health Information for International Travel: (The "Yellow Book"). The Yellow Book was updated in May 2003 to include a new chapter on traveling with children, new text on scuba diving and high-risk travelers, new recommendations on malaria prophylaxis and yellow fever vaccination, and expanded text on altitude sickness, to name a few.

Some features of the Travelers' Health website include regional risks for illness and recommended vaccinations, country-specific malaria prevention information, notification of disease outbreaks, measures to prevent mosquito bites, and a new registry of certified providers of yellow fever vaccine.

CDC recommends travelers visit a health-care provider 4-6 weeks before their departure date to allow time for vaccinations to take effect. Travelers are reminded of other measures to stay healthy:

- Practice frequent and thorough hand washing with soap and water or a waterless, alcohol-based hand rub.
- Drink only bottled or boiled water, or carbonated (bubbly) drinks in cans or bottles. Avoid tap water, fountain drinks, and ice cubes.
- Eat only thoroughly cooked food or fruits and vegetables they have peeled themselves and remember to **boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it.**
- If visiting an area where there is risk of malaria, take malaria prevention medication before, during, and after travel, as directed.
- Use insect repellent containing up to 50% DEET, according to the manufacturer's directions.

Source: National Center for Infectious Diseases, Travelers' Health Tips for Travelers, May 2004

Popcorn ... An American Food

FACT: Popcorn is one of the oldest American foods and has had a significant role in our history. Some of the oldest ears of popcorn were found in 1948 by archaeologists exploring the Bat Cave in west central New Mexico. These ears were proven to be about 4,000 years old.

Popcorn was used by the Native Americans as a staple in their diet and for decoration. Sixteenth century Aztec Indians used popcorn in their ceremonies; young women danced a “popcorn dance” and wore garlands of popcorn in their hair.

Early Americans threw popcorn kernels directly into the fire or into heated sand. Once popped, the corn was sifted and then pounded into a fine, powdery meal and later mixed with water for eating. This was especially handy when traveling making it a true American “to go” meal.

WHAT IS POPCORN?

There are six different types of corn, and of the varieties (sweet, dent, flint, pod, flour and popcorn), popcorn is the only corn that pops. Although popcorn has a scientific name, *zea mays everta*, no two kinds of popcorn are alike. Kernels range in color from off-white to light gold, to red, black and many colors in between.

Once popped, popcorn has two basic shapes: snowflake, which pops big and is shaped like a cumulus cloud; and mushroom, which pops into a round ball.

But just what is it about popcorn that makes it pop? The answer is *water*. The popcorn kernel’s general composition is carbohydrate (principally starch), protein, fat and water. Water is stored in a small circle of soft starch in each kernel. As the kernel is heated, the water heats, builds up pressure and takes up any available room. The harder surface surrounding the starch resists the water pressure for as long as it can. When the outer surface gives way, the water further expands, causing popcorn to explode. The soft starch pops out, the kernel turns inside out, steam inside the kernel is released, and the corn pops.

Processors generally adjust the moisture level in popcorn to 13.5 or 14 percent to insure maximum popability.

Proper moisture level is the reason it’s important to store popcorn properly. Use airtight containers and store popcorn in a cool cupboard. Stay away from storing popcorn in the refrigerator. Air inside a refrigerator contains very little moisture and can cause the popcorn to dry out.

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Popcorn (continued)

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO POP POPCORN?

Whether you choose to pop popcorn in an electric popper, on the stove, or over an open fire, here are tips to remember to guarantee perfect popping.

First, warm the popper, heavy pan or heavy skillet. If oil popping your corn, add ¼ cup of cooking oil to the pan. Vegetable oils are low in saturated fat. Allow the oil to heat. The best popping temperature is between 400 degrees Fahrenheit and 460 degrees Fahrenheit.

Oil burns at 500 degrees Fahrenheit, so if your oil starts to smoke, it is too hot. Any cooking oil will work provided it can retain the proper temperature. Don't pop popcorn in butter. Butter will burn.

Test the heat of the oil by dropping in one or two kernels. When the kernel pops or spins in the oil, you're ready to add the remaining popcorn. Pour just enough kernels to cover the bottom of the pan. Shake the pan to be certain the oil coats each kernel.

MORE POPPING TIPS

Salt will toughen the popcorn. Salt the popcorn after it's popped. Or, after popping, add herbs. If you choose the stove method of popping, be sure the lid of the pan is loose enough to allow steam to escape.

WHAT ABOUT MICROWAVE PRODUCTS?

Microwave popcorn is the same as other popcorn except the kernels are usually larger and the packaging is designed to insure maximum popability. It's best to use microwave popcorn in the microwave. Never put popcorn in a paper bag for microwave popping – it could cause a fire, damage your microwave and ruin your popcorn. Also, use care when opening packages just out of the microwave by allowing steam to vent away from you.

IS POPCORN ECONOMICAL?

Popcorn is a very economical grain and a very economical way to add fiber to your diet. On average, two tablespoons of unpopped kernels produce a quart of popcorn for about a nickel. Not only is popcorn a low-calorie high-fiber treat, it's a bargain too!

IS POPCORN NUTRITIOUS?

Popcorn is a good source of carbohydrate energy and fiber. Fiber is an important part of a healthy diet and has many health benefits; unfortunately, most Americans do not get enough fiber in their diets. There are two kinds of fiber – soluble and insoluble. Soluble plays a role in regulating hunger, cholesterol and blood sugar, and insoluble is important in gastrointestinal health.

Popcorn has no artificial color or flavor additives and is surprisingly low in calories. One cup of popped popcorn has 31 calories if eaten plain or seasoned with herbs; 133 calories if drizzled with a tablespoon of butter, margarine or oil.

Source: The Popcorn Board, Chicago, IL

Picnic and Food Safety Reminders

Picnic and Food Safety Reminders

It's picnic season and millions of families are packing their coolers and heading outdoors. Whether you're ordering out or bringing the food from home, there are several important facts to remember about food safety. And, despite what your mother may have told you, mayonnaise does not increase the chances of food poisoning. In fact, commercially prepared mayonnaise actually contains ingredients that protect against bacteria. It's homemade mayonnaise recipes using unpasteurized eggs that gave birth to the myth that mayonnaise causes food poisoning.

The Association for Dressings and Sauces (ADS) has collected 50 years of research that supports this claim. The trade group of mayonnaise and salad dressing manufacturers and suppliers blames the bad rap on old recipes for homemade mayonnaise which call for raw eggs in the ingredients.

"Our studies have shown that when harmful bacteria are added to commercially prepared mayonnaise they die off quickly," reports Dr. Michael Doyle, Ph.D., Professor and Director of the University of Georgia, Center for Food Safety and Quality Enhancement. Doyle, lead researcher for the most recently completed study, says this ability to kill bacteria is "largely because of the presence of the acid that's added to commercial mayonnaise. This includes vinegar, lemon juice and salt."

"Many years ago, people were making their mayonnaise from scratch using raw, unpasteurized eggs," said Pam Chumley, food technologist and executive director for ADS. According to Chumley, today's commercially made mayonnaise and mayonnaise-type salad dressings are carefully formulated and subjected to rigorous quality control measures. "Commercial mayonnaise products are made with pasteurized eggs in a high-acid environment that slows, even inhibits, bacterial growth. It's the low-acid ingredients (chicken, ham, potatoes) that are often mixed with mayonnaise which are most susceptible to the growth of food poisoning bacteria " she reports.

Keeping food safe starts in the kitchen and moves to the picnic table.

Practice Cleanliness

Wash hands, utensils, and other food contact surfaces using soap and water after contact with raw meat or poultry and before contact with the same food when cooked. Make sure all sandwich and salad ingredients are fresh and properly washed, keeping foods separate to avoid cross-contamination. When you're on the road and running water is not available, take along disposable, wet hand-wipes or the new hand sanitizers that don't require water to clean hands before and after working with food.

Cook foods to proper temperatures and store promptly, keeping hot foods hot and cold foods cold. When traveling with food, keep all perishables in a cooler with ice or freeze-pack inserts until serving time. Frozen juice boxes can also serve double-time as ice cubes. Make sure that food is cold or frozen to the touch before placing it in the cooler or cold thermos. Use a thermos designed for hot foods to keep soup, chili and stews at a safe high temperature for several hours. Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours when the temperature in the food serving area is below 90 degrees F, within 1 hour when the temperature is above 90 degrees F.

Source: The Association for Dressings and Sauces is an international association of salad dressing and sauce manufacturers and their suppliers used in making these products.

Key Terms Important to an Understanding of the Role of Fat in the Diet

Cholesterol - Chemical compound manufactured in the body. It is used to build cell membranes and brain and nerve tissues. Cholesterol also helps the body make steroid hormones and bile acids.

Dietary cholesterol - Cholesterol found in animal products that are part of the human diet. Egg yolks, liver, meat, some shellfish, and whole-milk dairy products are all sources of dietary cholesterol.

Fatty acid - A molecule composed mostly of carbon and hydrogen atoms. Fatty acids are the building blocks of fats.

Fat - A chemical compound containing one or more fatty acids. Fat is one of the three main constituents of food (the others are protein and carbohydrate). It is also the principal form in which energy is stored in the body.

Hydrogenated fat - A fat that has been chemically altered by the addition of hydrogen atoms (see trans fatty acid). Vegetable shortening and margarine are hydrogenated fats.

Lipid - A chemical compound characterized by the fact that it is insoluble in water. Both fat and cholesterol are members of the lipid family.

Lipoprotein - A chemical compound made of fat and protein. Lipoproteins that have more fat than protein are called low-density lipoproteins (LDLs). Lipoproteins that have more protein than fat are called high-density lipoproteins (HDLs). Lipoproteins are found in the blood, where their main function is to carry cholesterol.

Monounsaturated fatty acid - A fatty acid missing one pair of hydrogen atoms in the middle of the molecule. The gap is called an "unsaturation." Monounsaturated fatty acids are found mostly in plant and seafoods. Olive oil and canola oil are high in monounsaturated fatty acids. Monounsaturated fatty acids tend to lower levels of LDL-cholesterol in the blood.

Polyunsaturated fatty acid - A fatty acid missing more than one pair of hydrogen atoms. Polyunsaturated fatty acids are mostly found in plants and seafoods. Safflower oil and corn oil are high in polyunsaturated fatty acids. Polyunsaturated fatty acids tend to lower levels of both HDL-cholesterol and LDL-cholesterol in the blood.

Saturated fatty acid - A fatty acid that has the maximum possible number of hydrogen atoms attached to every carbon atom. It is said to be "saturated" with hydrogen atoms. Saturated fatty acids are mostly found in animal products such as meat and whole milk. Butter and lard are high in saturated fatty acids. Saturated fatty acids tend to raise levels of LDL-cholesterol ("bad" cholesterol) in the blood. Elevated levels of LDL-cholesterol are associated with heart disease.

Trans fatty acid - A polyunsaturated fatty acid in which some of the missing hydrogen atoms have been put back in a chemical process called hydrogenation, resulting in "straighter" fatty acids that solidify at higher temperatures. Trans fatty acids are under study to determine their effects on cholesterol.

Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Solar Energy Basics

Sunlight – solar energy – can be used to generate electricity, provide hot water, and to heat, cool, and light buildings.

Photovoltaic (solar cell) systems convert sunlight directly into electricity. A solar or PV cell consists of semiconducting material that absorbs the sunlight. The solar energy knocks electrons loose from their atoms, allowing the electrons to flow through the material to produce electricity. PV cells are typically combined into modules that hold about 40 cells. About 10 of these modules are mounted in **PV arrays**. PV arrays can be used to generate electricity for a single building or, in large numbers, for a power plant. A power plant can also use a **concentrating solar power system**, which uses the sun's heat to generate electricity. The sunlight is collected and focused with mirrors to create a high-intensity heat source. This heat source produces steam or mechanical power to run a generator that creates electricity.

Solar water heating systems for buildings have two main parts: a solar collection and a storage tank. Typically, a **flat-plate collector** – a thin, flat, rectangular box with a transparent cover – is mounted on the roof, facing the sun. The sun heats an absorber plate in the collector, which, in turn, heats the fluid running through tubes within the collector. To move the heated fluid between the collector and the storage tank, a system either uses a pump or gravity, as water has a tendency to naturally circulate as it is heated. Systems that use fluids other than water in the collector's tubes usually heat the water by passing it through a coil of tubing in the tank. Many large commercial buildings can use solar collectors to provide more than just hot water. Solar process heating systems can be used to heat these buildings. A solar ventilation system can be used in cold climates to preheat air as it enters a building. And the heat from solar collectors can even be used to provide energy for cooling a building.

A solar collector is not always needed when using sunlight to heat a building. Some buildings can be designed for **passive solar** heating. These buildings usually have large, south-facing windows. Materials that absorb and store the sun's heat can be built into the sunlit floors and walls. The floors and walls will then heat up during the day and slowly release heat at night – a process called **direct gain**. Many of the passive solar heating design features also provide **daylighting**. Daylighting is simply the use of natural sunlight to brighten up a building's interior.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy

Young, Inactive and Overweight

Since the late 1970's, the percentage of overweight children six to eighteen years old has more than doubled. Being overweight as an adolescent poses great health risks. Those who are seriously overweight as adolescents have a 50 to 100 percent greater mortality rate as young and middle-aged adults. Furthermore, what was once considered adult-onset diabetes is so common among today's overweight adolescents that it can't be called adult-onset any more.

Researchers view the current trends in children's weight with great concern. Now is the time to try and help the overweight among our youth. Here are some suggestions on how to go about doing it.

Parents and Children, Play Ball

Recess and gym class are becoming ancient history. After-school unwinding involves activities with computers and TV, instead of bikes and other active play. Experts generally recommend an hour a day of moderate activity. The key is to make activity fun. Kids don't want to be nagged. They want their parents to show them what to do.

Another way to increase activity is to limit television use. Children and adolescents watch an average of almost three hours of TV daily. Video and computer games raise that average to over six hours a day. The American Academy of Pediatrics urges parents to limit total screen time to no more than two hours daily.

Undoing the Jinx of Junk Food

One of the biggest obstacles is soft drink consumption, which rose 500 percent in the U.S. in the last five years. Sodas pose real difficulties for weight control. Research shows that we don't cut back on other foods to adjust for the extra calories we take in with soft drinks. Gradually choosing more fruits, whole grain cereals or other nutritious snacks, and limiting soft drinks, should be the objective.

The mostly plant-based diet recommended by the American Institute for Cancer Research, emphasizing vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans, can also help with weight control. Only one in five children gets even the minimum recommendation of five fruits and vegetables a day. One goal might be to include several servings of fruit or vegetables in each meal. It's fine to start with one serving.

Proper portion sizes should also be served. The sizes of food portions both in and out of the home have increased dramatically. We eat substantially more than we need to when given larger portions.

Source: American Institute for Cancer Research, www.aicr.org

Florida Food Fare

By Mary King

Cooperative Extension for Sarasota County

Cucumber

Keeps its cool in hot weather

Cool and moist due to its high water content, the cucumber belongs to the gourd family. Mild, crisp flesh surrounds its soft, edible seeds. The most common varieties of regular cucumbers are slicers and picklers. The pickling cucumbers are small and have lumps on the surface. Mature slicing cucumbers vary in length between six and eight inches and from 1 ½ to 2 ½ inches in diameter and are often waxed to seal in moisture. They are usually harvested at a more mature stage than picklers. Gourmet cucumbers, sometimes called burpless or seedless, are longer and thinner than regular cucumbers. Shrink-wrapped to seal in moisture, these are not waxed.

Availability: Florida produces more cucumbers than any other state. They are available year-round. May is the peak of the growing season.

Nutritional value: Cucumbers are very low in calories, fat and sodium and are cholesterol-free.

Selection and Care: Look for firm, fresh, well-shaped cucumbers that have a rich green color and a smooth skin. Avoid those with shriveled or soft spots. Over-mature cucumbers may be tough and somewhat bitter. Often a thick coat of edible wax is sprayed on cucumbers to help keep them fresh. They should be refrigerated, unwashed, in a plastic bag and may be kept for approximately a week. They store most successfully at a temperature of 45 to 50° F. Unwaxed cucumbers can easily lose moisture, so keep them wrapped tightly in plastic. Wash thoroughly before using. Cut cucumbers can be refrigerated, tightly wrapped from three to five days.

Preparation and use: Fresh cucumbers are a favorite in green salads and on relish trays. They are generally served raw and sliced or diced in any number of ways. Leaving the peel on is optional and adds color and interest. Removing seeds is also optional.

Recipe:

Chilled Cucumber Soup

5 cucumbers	¼ cup fresh lemon juice
½ cup chopped parsley	1 quart buttermilk*
6 scallions, chopped	1 pint plain non fat yogurt
2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill	Salt and freshly ground pepper

Peel cucumbers and cut them in half, scraping out seeds. Sprinkle the cucumbers with salt and let them stand 30 minutes. Drain excess water. Chop cucumbers coarsely and put pieces in the blender along with scallions, dill, lemon juice, buttermilk and yogurt. Blend at high speed. Season with salt and pepper. Chill well before serving. Serves 6.

*The buttermilk in your grocer's dairy case is made commercially by adding a lactic acid bacteria culture to pasteurized skim or non-fat milk. The milk is then fermented to make what we know of as buttermilk. Because it is made with non-fat or skim milk, buttermilk is quite low in fat. You would actually be hard-pressed to find a buttermilk made with whole milk.
