



Oxalates, Lectins, and Phytates... Oh My!

You may have seen posts warning you to avoid certain plant foods because they contain so-called “anti-nutrients,” or compounds like oxalates, lectins, and phytates that supposedly block nutrient absorption or harm your health.

But here’s the thing: these so-called “anti-nutrients” are in almost every plant food we eat. And for most people, they’re nothing to worry about. In fact, most actually have benefits. Let’s break it down:

Oxalates

Plants make oxalates as a natural defense system and to help manage calcium internally. They’re found in spinach, beets, rhubarb, and other leafy greens. In humans, oxalates can bind to calcium in the gut and slightly reduce its absorption. In rare cases—especially in people prone to kidney stones—high intake may contribute to stone formation. But for most people, the amount of oxalate in food is not a problem, especially when eaten as part of a varied diet.

Oxalate-containing foods like spinach and beets are also rich in fiber, folate, potassium, and antioxidants. The benefits far outweigh any minor impact on calcium.

Phytates (aka phytic acid)

Phytates are storage compounds that plants use to hold phosphorus for germination. They’re found in whole grains, legumes, seeds, and nuts.

Phytates can slightly reduce the absorption of minerals like iron and zinc—but only in the specific meal you’re eating, not across your whole diet.

And they may actually *benefit* health by acting as antioxidants and helping regulate blood sugar.

Bonus: traditional prep methods like soaking, sprouting, fermenting, and cooking reduce phytate content naturally (without you needing to think about it).

Lectins

Lectins help plants protect themselves from pests and pathogens. They’re found in many legumes like kidney beans, lentils, soybeans, and peanuts, as well as tomatoes and some grains.

In large amounts and in raw form, some lectins can be harmful. But this is a non-issue, because cooking destroys them. No one’s munching on raw kidney beans! Soaking and boiling (or sprouting) beans eliminates nearly all active lectins, making them safe and incredibly nutritious.

Beans and lentils are among the most health-promoting foods in the world—high in fiber, plant protein, and linked to reduced risk of heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers.

Bottom line:

These compounds are part of what makes plant foods so good for us. They come packaged with fiber, vitamins, minerals, and protective plant chemicals. That’s why diets rich in beans, vegetables, and whole grains are consistently linked to better health—not worse. So don’t let fear-based nutrition trends convince you to cut out the healthiest foods on your plate.

Summer Spinach Salad with Stone Fruit, Walnuts, and Farro



This seasonal salad delivers flavor, fiber, and plenty of minerals—all without fear.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups fresh spinach
- 1 ripe peach or nectarine, sliced
- ½ cup cooked farro
- ¼ cup thinly sliced red onion
- 2 tablespoons chopped walnuts
- 2 tablespoons crumbled feta (optional)
- Juice of ½ lemon
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

In a large bowl, toss spinach with farro, red onion, and stone fruit. Drizzle with olive oil and lemon juice, then toss again to coat. Top with walnuts and feta if using. Season to taste. Serve immediately.