

Mushrooms for Life Interview

Transcript

Tony: Glenn Cardwell, he is back. He is an Accredited Practising Dietitian, author and an expert on mushroom nutrition. Now Glenn is here with us to provide an update on the latest science on mushrooms and their influence on health. Glenn, nice to see you again. Just before we talk about the latest research, just give us an idea why mushrooms have that beautiful meaty flavour.

Glenn: Well taste is often divided into sweet, salty, sour and bitter. Now there is actually a fifth taste Tony, which the Japanese call umami and describes the food which has got a savoury or a meaty flavour. Now umami is the flavour of mushrooms. There are natural compounds in the mushrooms that give it a very meaty tang. And they are the same compounds that are also responsible for much of the flavour of things such as tomato juice and Parmesan cheese.

Now, if you talk to your vegetarian friends I am sure they will admit that they really enjoy the meaty flavour of mushrooms. In fact mushrooms are really a meat eaters vegetarian food. That is why they go so well on the barbecue or in stir fries because the cooking enhances this umami or meaty taste.

Tony: That is fantastic. Daughter number one is a vegetarian and she just loves mushrooms at the moment. At the International Mushroom Science conference recently, you were there, what did you learn?

Glenn: Well, one quite fascinating talk to me Tony was by a guy called Prof Van Grienvan from the Netherlands. His simple take-home message was that there was a combination of compounds that work together in mushrooms that can make a real difference when it comes to health. People often talk about vitamins or antioxidants and, of course, these are important, but the real focus should be on the combination of compounds working together in food.

He explained that the sugars or carbohydrates and the anti-oxidant compounds, which are called polyphenols in this case, in mushrooms all work together to provide protection to the body by helping enhance the immune system. So it wasn't a single molecule in the mushroom that boosts health, because we can easily demonstrate the sugars or carbohydrates on their own had no effect and the oxidants on their

own had no effect. What you really need is for them to work together, so they can kill the harmful cells in the body.

Tony: It is all about the combination as you say isn't it?

Glenn: Well, what excites us about this Tony is that it reminds us that health benefits come from a whole mushroom and not from single compounds of the mushroom. The antioxidants in the mushrooms are being helped by other natural compounds that we find in the mushroom.

Tony: Pretty exciting too, the recent research that hinted that mushrooms - and this is fantastic - could in fact help people to lose those extra kilos.

Glenn: Oh yes Tony, this is a US study that gave a mushroom-based meal instead of a meat-based meal for four consecutive days and found that eaters of the mushrooms ate less kilojoules each day. Now the thing to remember here is that no one actually ate less food. What happened was that in replacing the meat for the mushrooms, they still felt full, but actually ate over 1500 kJ or 370 cal less each day, and that is a huge drop.

The great thing is that because they felt full they didn't actually feel the need to eat anything else to compensate for the reduction in kilojoules. So it is a real win-win for those people who enjoy good food and who want to either lose weight or to maintain a pretty healthy weight. The researchers said that if people substituted a mushroom-based meal for a fatty meal only twice a week, they could lose about 5 kg a year. That is fairly sensational and I think this shows that mushrooms can satisfy the appetite and are quite filling for a low number of kilojoules. So we suggest that people eat three button mushrooms as a serve, which is barely 100 kJ, or 24 cal in the old language, and is very filling of course and you get the benefits of the B vitamins and the antioxidants I mentioned earlier.

Tony: If you have just joined us we are talking to Glenn Cardwell an Accredited Practising Dietitian, an author and an expert on mushroom nutrition. And we are talking about a range of things and in particular the government which has just asked for submissions for the Dietary Guidelines. These are pretty important. So what does it mean, Glenn, for the mushroom industry?

Glenn: Well Tony, right now mushrooms do not feature highly in any of the government documents on healthy eating. Now, that would be expected if we don't eat many mushrooms, but that is not the case. Here in Australia mushrooms are the third biggest-selling, fresh food item at the supermarket. So you can see that mushrooms actually play a big part in the diet of Australians. What we want is for the government to catch up with what the people are eating, because four out of five households now buy mushrooms regularly. And we are eating 20 per cent more than the last time the government actually checked what Australians were eating. Now it is important that mushrooms are recognised as an important food item in the Australia diet.

Tony: We will give the details in a moment Glenn. There is a fantastic website where you can find out more about all this. For those who want to look at this website what is the best way to have a look at those so frequently asked questions.

Glenn: The website is www.mushroomsforlife.net and there is a lot there. You have mentioned the frequently asked questions, there are Fact Sheets on the benefits of mushrooms, and there is also an in-depth science update for those who would like to read about our research.

Tony: Nice to see you again Glenn Cardwell.

Glenn: Thanks Tony.

Tony: If you would like to find out more and have a look at that website it's www.mushroomsforlife.net.