

**OKRA** is also known as gumbo (the Swahili name for okra). The plant was brought to the New World by African slaves during the slave trade.

It is a tall-growing, warm-season, annual vegetable from the same family as hollyhock, rose of Sharon and hibiscus.

The immature pods are used for soups, canning and stews or as a fried or boiled vegetable. The hibiscus-like flowers and upright plant (three to six feet or more in height) have ornamental value for backyard gardens.

Okra is a powerhouse of valuable nutrients, nearly half of

## Wonders of okra



(GP)

which is soluble fibre in the form of gums and pectins. Soluble fibre helps to lower serum cholesterol, reducing the risk of heart disease. The other half is insoluble fibre, which helps to keep the intestinal tract healthy, decreasing the risk of some forms of cancer, especially colorectal cancer. Nearly

10 per cent of the recommended levels of vitamin B6 and folic acid are also present in a half-cup of cooked okra.

### Okra Nutrition (half-cup cooked okra)

- Calories = 25
- Dietary Fibre = 2 grams

- Protein = 1.5 grams
- Carbohydrates = 5.8 grams
- Vitamin A = 460 IU
- Vitamin C = 13 mg
- Folic acid = 36.5 micrograms
- Calcium = 50 mg
- Iron = 0.4 mg
- Potassium = 256 mg
- Magnesium = 46 mg

These numbers should be used as a guideline only, and if you are on a medically restricted diet please consult your physician and/or dietician.

Sylvia W. Zook, Ph.D. (nutritionist) has very kindly provided the following thought-provoking comments on the many benefits of this versatile vegetable.

- The superior fibre found in okra helps to stabilise blood sugar as it curbs the rate at which sugar is absorbed from the intestinal tract.
- Okra's mucilage not only binds cholesterol but bile acid carrying toxins dumped into it by the filtering liver. But it doesn't stop there.
- Many alternative health practitioners believe all disease begins in the colon. The okra fibre, absorbing water and ensuring bulk in stools, helps prevent and improve constipation. Fibre in general is helpful for this, but okra is one of the best, along with ground flax seed and psyllium. Okra facilitates elimination by its slippery characteristic many people abhor. In other words, this incredibly valuable vegetable not only binds excess cholesterol and toxins (in bile acids) which cause numerous health problems if not evacuated, but then assures easy passage out of the body of same. Unlike some prescription and over-the-counter drugs for this, the veggie is completely non-toxic, non-habit forming (except for the many that greatly enjoy eating it!), has no adverse side effects, is full of nutrients, and is economically within reach of most.
- Further contributing to the health of the intestinal tract, okra fibre (as well as flax and psyllium) has no equal among fibres for feeding the good bacteria (probiotics).
- To retain most of okra's nutrients and self-digesting enzymes, it should be cooked as little as possible, for example with low heat or lightly steamed. Some eat it raw. However, if one is going to fry it (and it is undeniably delicious prepared that way when rolled in cornmeal and salt), only extra virgin olive oil, or UNREFINED coconut butter is recommended.

Information adapted from the University of Illinois Extension website.

This page compliments

# BHL

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## Take note, don't smoke!

MANY PEOPLE are not aware of the global tobacco epidemic that is killing an average of one person every six seconds. Every year tobacco use reaps nearly five million lives and is projected to kill one billion people this century if the current trend is not halted. The epidemic is shifting to the developing countries like Barbados which has about a 10 per cent smoking prevalence per population.

Some may argue that we don't have a smoking problem but cigarette smoking has already taken its toll. Bajans are already suffering from the harmful effects of direct smoking and by extension second hand smoke.

If the health of the nation is going to be the wealth of the nation then we can't afford to be lured into a false sense of security.

Proactive actions become necessary to protect the lives of our citizens; these include enacting legislative measures to legitimise pictorial health warnings thereby providing warnings to the public about the dangers of tobacco on the very packages that they come in. Old proverbial wisdom tells us a picture is worth more than a thousand words.

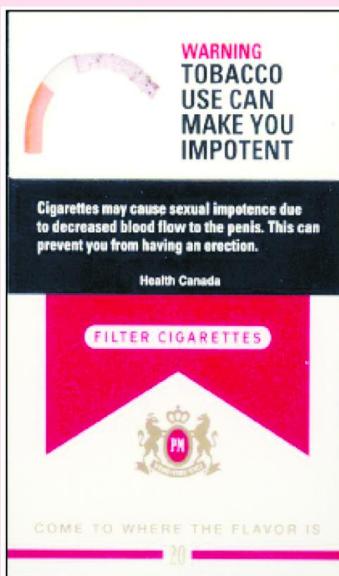
Pictorial health warnings on the packets of cigarettes have proven to be a cost effective way of informing smokers of those dangers. Reports that came from Canada, the first country to implement pictorial warnings since 2001, showed that pictorial warnings appeared to be especially effective among young people. Ninety per cent

of Canadian youths agreed that picture warnings on Canadian packages have provided them with important information about the health effects of smoking cigarettes and they made smoking seem less attractive.

A pack-a-day smoker will potentially be exposed to the warnings some 7 000 times per year. In Barbados smokers will be exposed to picture-warnings that include the dangers to the male sexual and reproductive health.

**Men Listen Up!** Smoking can cause impotence and damage the sperm thereby decreasing fertility. Yes, smoking can kill your "boy" before it kills you and it can cause you to "fire blank shots" as well. **Take note and don't smoke!**

**"WARNING: MEN BEWARE!"**  
Smoking can reduce blood flow causing impotence and embarrassment



**REPORTS** show that pictorial warnings on cigarette packets are effective among the youth. (GPs)



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