

Stacy Beeson, RD, LD  
St Luke's Registered Dietitian

**NUTRITION SEGMENT OCTOBER 22, 2007: Squash the Idea of Not Eating Squash**

What a poor name for such a nutrient powerhouse of a vegetable! Squash should be named POW! Winter squash could be considered a superfood because of its abundance of antioxidants, vitamins, minerals and fiber. As evidenced by its deep orange and yellow-colored flesh, squash has an abundance of vitamin A and B vitamins, the phytochemicals beta carotene and lutein, potassium and the hard-to-get Vitamin E. Unlike their summer counterparts, winter squash can last for 3-6 months at home, comes in a variety of colors and tastes.

**VARIETIES:**

- **Acorn squash:** This acorn-shaped squash is excellent for baking. It is dark green with deep ridges and orange markings. Acorn squash can also be orange and white. All of them have deep yellow flesh. The skin is very hard and difficult to cut so baking it whole is best.
- **Buttercup squash:** This drum-like shaped squash that looks like it's wearing a cap comes in orange and green. Its flesh is deep oranges and quite sweet.
- **Butternut squash:** This long-necked bell-shaped squash has cream-colored skin and deep orange-colored flesh. Its seed base is small so it has a lot of flesh for its size.
- **Spaghetti Squash:** This oval-shaped squash is unique in that its flesh forms spaghetti strands that can be pulled out with a fork. (see lower section on How to Prepare Spaghetti Squash).

**CHOOSING:**

- Look for smooth, dry skin, free of cracks or soft spots.
- Deep color is a good sign for a healthy squash.
- It should feel heavy for its size.
- Choose squash with the stems attached. The stems should be rounded and dry, not collapsed or blackened.

**STORAGE:**

- Uncut squash should last for 3 months or longer in a cool, dry place.
- Storing it in the refrigerator will cause squash to deteriorate more quickly.
- Cut squash will keep for up to a week if it is tightly wrapped and refrigerated.

**CREATIVE WAYS TO USE:**

- Puree roasted squash with broth and seasonings to make a soup, and garnish with toasted squash seeds.
- Use whole small steamed or baked squash as serving bowls for soups or stews. Scoop out flesh after baking and use it in the soup.
- Add chunks of squash to soups, stews and chili.
- Halve and seed an acorn squash and stuff with brown rice or quinoa (quick-cooking grain) and bake.
- Stuff manicotti with a combination of pureed winter squash and low-fat cottage cheese.

### **HOW TO CUT:**

- 1) Make a shallow cut in the skin to use as your guide to help prevent the knife from slipping.
  - 2) Place the blade in the shallow cut and tap the base of the knife with your fist until the squash is cut through.
  - 3) Scoop out the seeds and fiber and cut into parts or smaller chunks.
- \*If squash is too hard to cut, bake or steam them whole after pricking with a fork.

### **HOW TO PREPARE SPAGHETTI SQUASH:**

- Pierce the skin in several places with a fork and put it in a baking pan.
- Bake at 350 for 1 - 1½ hours until the squash gives when squeezed.
- When cool enough to handle, cut the squash lengthwise, scoop out the seeds and fiber and take a fork and begin to scrape the squash flesh. It will come out in strands.
- Serve the strands with your favorite spaghetti sauce or olive oil and fresh herbs.  
OR
- To cook squash halves, cut the raw squash lengthwise through the middle (to get the full spaghetti-like strands).
- Place the halves cut-side up in a pot and add 2" boiling water. Cover and simmer until tender. Shred the squash and serve like above.

*For more questions, contact Stacy Beeson @ 381-2403 or [beesons@slrhc.org](mailto:beesons@slrhc.org).*