The usual suspects of protein, vitamins, minerals, carbs and sugar are old and familiar as the basic components of nutrition. More recently, enzymes have entered into the arena of nutritional awareness, while the newest kids on the chopping block are phytonutrients. Unable to flee or hide, plants armor themselves with an arsenal of phytonutrients. With these, they defend themselves from adversities such as ultraviolet light, blight, heat, frost and drought, and from adversaries such as bugs, bunnies and us.

Phyto means plant, though we would not be altogether inaccurate to interpret the Ancient Greek to mean fight, which is how the word is pronounced. Phytonutrients in turn benefit us undeserving animals who eat them by boosting our stamina, lowering our blood pressure, reducing blood cholesterol levels, preventing infection, reducing inflammation, strengthening immunity, protecting brain cells, enhancing mood and guarding against depression. Knowing all this, just thinking about not eating plants should be enough to make anyone feel depressed.
Swallowing chemical supplements is delaying aging processes. The list is so long that we cannot investigate the sum-total of scientific studies, whether longitudinal or cross-sectional, analyzing the role of sprouts in promoting health and curing disease, or slowing some aging processes. The list is so long that rather than here summarize the summaries, better that you consult ISS’s leading supplier of seeds and equipment to professional sprout growers, International Specialty Supply, a division of ISS’s largest greenhouse. Microgreens are newcomers to our menus. First coined in 1997, even the word microgreens is new. Microgreens start as sprouts and then keep on growing. Sprouts are footloose, while microgreens put down some roots. Sprouts thrive under cover of darkness, while microgreens seek the light of day. Microgreens are cultivated with warm and water, same as sprouts, but also under light and upon soil. Microgreens are not just the holy trinity of sunflower greens, pea green sprouts, and wheatgrass that seem to form the foundation of some raw foods diet. More than 50 other species of microgreens can be grown at home indoors. While microgreens were long known by the name seedlings, only with the new millennium have such seedlings begun to occupy a sizable portion on our dinner plates.

As you can see, one comprehensive study has determined their nutritional contents, while still not investigating any curative properties. Published in 2012, this study was conducted by the USDA research lab affiliated with the University of Maryland. Its abstract can be found at: http://pubs.acs.org/doi/pdf/10.1021/jf300459b

The USDA researchers analyzed 25 microgreens purchased from an organic microgreen farm in San Diego that were shipped overnight across the country to Maryland. So some nutrition was lost compared to what you might grow at home and move across your kitchen from windowsill to dinner plate. Still, results were impressive. As just one example of how microgreens compare ounce for ounce with their fully mature veggies, red cabbage microgreens contain 260 times the provitamin A, 6 times the vitamin C, 40 times the vitamin E, and 29 times the antioxidant lutein. Only a handful of vitamins and antioxidants were analyzed, so more evidence awaits.

Missing amongst all the above studies of sprouts and microgreens is one examining the longevity and aging of folks who eat lots of them, a study that is longitudinal over an entire human generation and epidemiological over an entire continent. The closest we might come to this would be by monitoring the adherence to high raw vegans diet fortified with lots of sprouts and greens, a diet advocated by Hippocrates Health Institute. Pardon my venture into the merely personal and anecdotal, but are we not all walking anecdotals? For more than 50 years, every three or four years I attended the annual conferences of two national organizations. Three of four years proved a sufficient time span for me to notice aging in the regular attendees who returned to these conferences year after year.

One conference was of the College Art Association (CAA), whose membership comprised largely of art history and studio art professors. Most were brilliant scholars who held PhDs or creative artists with MFAs. As evidence by the breakfasts and lunches they ate at the conference hotels, most consumed conventional Western diets of red meat, white flour, white sugar, white milk and black coffee. At evening social events, alcohol freely flowed and desserts became main courses. When I saw them every three of four years, most folks indeed looked three or four years older. In other words, they looked their age.

The other conference was of the North American Vegetarian Society (NAVS), whose regular participants all were vegans, and mostly high raw and wholly whole foods vegans at that. Though the meals were vegetarian banquets with unlimited portions, most folks ate frugally. The raw foods bar always was the first to run out. Evening events ended with watermelon parties. Before breakfast, early risers engaged in yoga or swimming or running or hiking or just plain old walking. Some held PhDs and MDS, but mostly they hailed from all walks of life. They all were the pictures of health. When I saw them every three or four years, most folks looked like they had hardly aged at all. In other words, they seemed ageless.

I had little need to read any scientific studies, whether longitudinal or epidemiological or epistemological. In the athletic vegans’ youthful faces and agile bodies, I could read the book of life. Each of their books already has filled many pages and holds promise to fill many pages more. Parodied in jingle of Life. Each of their books already has filled many pages and holds promise to fill many pages more. Parodied in jingle of Life. Each of their books already has filled many pages and holds promise to fill many pages more. Parodied in jingle of Life. Each of their books already has filled many pages and holds promise to fill many pages more. Parodied in jingle of Life. Each of their books already has filled many pages and holds promise to fill many pages more. Parodied in jingle of Life. Each of their books already has filled many pages and holds promise to fill many pages more. Parodied in jingle of Life. Each of their books already has filled many pages and holds promise to fill many pages more. Parodied in jingle of Life.