

Fruits and Vegetables—More Matters!

Eating plenty of fruits and vegetables doesn't guarantee that you'll live forever or summit every mountain you attempt, but at least you'll give it your best shot. Fruits and vegetables are high in fiber, folate, potassium, phytonutrients (natural plant chemicals that appear to have disease-fighting properties) and anti-aging antioxidants, such as vitamin C. Naturally low in calories, these natural superfoods provide the health-enhancing nutrients with little danger of adding unwanted pounds. Plus, they taste good.

Unless you've been living on another planet the last several years, this is not breaking news. You're well aware that researchers have amassed a ton of data on the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables. Furthermore, mind-boggling as it may seem, scientists and health experts do agree on one thing—those people who eat five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables daily are the healthiest. No matter what health parameters are studied or what risks for disease assessed, the fruit and vegetable eaters come out ahead of the pack—most often, way ahead. Unbelievably, more than 75% of Americans still fail to eat a minimum of five servings each day of fruits and vegetables!

The bottom line: More matters. Eating some fruits and vegetables is better than none, and eating more is definitely better than some.

Use the following three simple guidelines to boost your daily fruit and veggie intake.

Step one: Eat a “rainbow” of fruits and vegetables every day.

Think color. Fruits and vegetables that are colorful, as in red, orange, deep yellow, green, deep blue and purple, qualify for “superfood” status. You're guaranteed hefty doses of vitamin C, carotenoids and other health-enhancing phytonutrients like anthocyanins, lycopene and lutein. Aim for at least one serving from each “stripe of the rainbow” or color group daily.

Red: tomatoes, pink grapefruit, red bell peppers, red apples, red pears, strawberries, raspberries, watermelon, radishes, beets

Orange/deep yellow: winter squash, carrots, sweet potatoes, sweet corn, cantaloupe, mango, oranges, papaya, apricots, pumpkin, yellow grapefruit, oranges, nectarines, peaches

Green: broccoli, spinach, kale, collard greens, bok choy, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, kiwi fruit, avocado, bell peppers, peas, avocados, green apples, green pears

Deep blue/purple: eggplant, blueberries, blackberries, red/purple cabbage, cherries, plums, prunes, figs, raisins, dates

Step two: Eat the real thing.

Don't waste your time on "pretenders"—juice drinks or beverages made with less than 100% fruit juice, high-calorie fruit smoothies with lots of "extras" and pale green side salads. And don't rationalize that you're fulfilling your quota by eating corn chips, strawberry pop-tarts or carrot cake. Supplements can help fill in the gaps, however, they don't supply fiber or yet-to-be discovered phytonutrients, nor do they satisfy hunger pains like real fruits and vegetables do.

In general, a one-cup serving (a common measuring cup—the kind used in recipes) is considered to be:

- 1 cup of raw or cooked vegetables or 100% vegetable juice,
- 2 cups of raw leafy greens,
- 1 cup of fruit or 100% fruit juice,
- a medium piece of fruit or large banana,
- ½ cup of dried fruit

Aim for two cups of fruit and three cups of vegetables daily. Contrary to public opinion, canned and frozen varieties are just as nutritious and can save time-crunched athletes valuable time.

Step three: Start early in the day.

Until it's a well established-habit, most people will have to work at eating enough fruits and vegetables a day. Waiting until dinner time makes it nearly impossible to accomplish—so start your day with a breakfast that includes a glass of 100% fruit or vegetable juice and some fruit and build from there.

1. Keep easy-to-grab-and-eat veggies on hand—baby carrots, sugar snap peas, cherry tomatoes and broccoli spears. To save time, purchase prepackaged ready-to-eat varieties (or get from the salad bar). Dip in low-fat salad dressing.
2. Keep small packages of dried fruit on hand (desk drawer, in the car, etc.) for healthy snacking. Go beyond raisins—dried plums, apricots, mangoes and cherries, and dates, too.
3. Top green salads with fruit: kiwi, mandarin oranges, pineapple chunks or nectarines.
4. Microwave a sweet potato for a quick, filling snack or lunch.
5. Include a mixed green salad or vegetable soup with lunch.
6. When not brown-bagging it—opt for fresh vegetable "wraps," vegetable pizza and veggie-based pasta dishes (without cream sauces).
7. Puree canned or frozen fruit, like berries, peaches or apricots, and keep on hand to spoon over vanilla yogurt, pudding or low-fat ice cream.

Recommended website: www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov

GINGERED BLUEBERRY-MELON TOSS

- 1/2 tablespoon honey
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
- 1/2 teaspoon grated lime peel
- 1/8 teaspoon ground ginger
- 2 cups fresh or frozen blueberries
- 1 cup diced cantaloupe

In a large bowl combine honey, lime juice, lime peel and ginger until well blended. Add blueberries and cantaloupe. Toss to coat. Serve at room temperature or chilled over pudding, angel fruit cake, lowfat yogurt or ice cream, etc.

Yield: about 3 cups

Source: United States Highbush Blueberry Council

Creamy Dip for Vegetables

A tasty way to get kids and adults to eat their vegetables.

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup lowfat sour cream
- 1/2 cup lowfat ranch dressing
- Pepper to taste

In a small bowl combine sour cream and ranch dressing. Add pepper to taste.

Source: K-State Research and Extension Family Nutrition Program
(www.kidsacooking.org)

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