

# PRODUCE FOR BETTER HEALTH

## Nutrition News You Can Use



Learn how to improve your health by including more produce in your diet

What if there were a great tasting food that could help reduce your risk of heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and some types of cancer, while also helping you to manage your weight? The good news is that there is! Simply eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables can significantly improve your health.

Fruits and vegetables are low in fat and calories and are loaded with vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants. All these nutrients make produce a real 'superfood'. The dietary guidelines for Americans recommend that you make half your plate fruits and vegetables. However, most of us don't get enough. On average, less than one third of the U.S. population meets this goal. So when it comes to produce, eating more is a great way to improve your health.

### **Nature's Super-Food:**

The power of fruits and vegetables comes from the variety of nutrients they provide. Nothing else we eat can give us the combination of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants found in a diet rich in produce. Nutrition experts know that many fruits and vegetables are good sources of vitamins A, C, and E, fiber and potassium.

But experts have also discovered that fruits and vegetables have many other antioxidants in them as well. Some antioxidants in fruits and vegetables are well known but others have names that we've never even heard of. These special nutrients have powerful health benefits because they help protect our body's cells from damage that occurs naturally every day. You can't find most of these antioxidants in a pill or in other foods, they can only be found together in fruits and vegetables.

### **Produce and Weight Management:**

Eating more produce is also a great way to help manage your weight. That's because many fruits and vegetables are naturally low in calories and fat. Fruits and vegetables also provide substantial amounts of fiber. Fiber-containing foods are digested slowly so you feel satisfied longer. Also, since most produce is made up of 80-95% water, the high water volume helps fill you up without lots of calories. Because of the low calories, high water volume, and high fiber content of fruits and vegetables, eating more will help you manage your weight.

### **Fruits and Veggies All-Year Round:**

Produce tastes best when it's fresh. And when it's available locally grown, fresh produce has been shown to have the highest nutrition content. However, there is little difference in the overall nutrition content between fresh, frozen, canned or dried produce. So in season, when you have the opportunity to buy fresh, take advantage of the availability, flavor and good prices. However, in the off-season when fresh can be hard to find and prices can be high it's important to keep eating fruits and vegetables.

Fruits and vegetables that are frozen or canned can be stored longer, making them more convenient. Frozen or canned produce can also be less expensive. However, be sure that canned vegetables are low in sodium and that canned fruits are packed in 100% juice instead of syrup. Dried produce is also a good choice. Dried fruit is a quick, convenient snack and can also be added to cereals and salads. Select dried fruits that are low in added sugar and if you are allergic to the additive sulfur dioxide, read the label to find choices that do not include this common ingredient.



Our dietitians receive hundreds of questions each year about a wide variety of nutrition topics. Their timely and trustworthy insights and ideas can help you and your family live healthier lives.

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### More Matters!

Now that you know the importance of fruits and vegetables to your health, here are some ways to make sure you are getting enough:

#### The veggie 'flip':

Typically vegetables are eaten as a side dish accompanying a large portion of meat. Instead, 'flip your serving sizes' by making produce the bigger portion. Fill at least half of your plate with vegetables or fruit and add meat, fish or chicken in smaller portions. Experiment with recipes and learn how to make fruits and veggies the core of any dish. For example make a vegetable stir-fry with a side of grilled shrimp; Top a bowl of fresh fruit with a little chicken salad; Have a dish of grilled veggies with a side of whole wheat pasta; or add a small can of tuna to a large green salad.

#### Mix it up:

Fruits and vegetables come in a variety of colors, shapes and sizes. In many cases different nutrients are associated with different colors. For example, green vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage, kale and brussels sprouts contain compounds that decrease the risk of some cancers. Mango, peppers, oranges, and cantaloupes and other yellow colored produce are usually rich in Vitamin C. Berries, grapes, and tomatoes, the red colored varieties, are loaded with phytochemicals, a kind of antioxidant that provides health benefits beyond that of just vitamins and minerals. Bananas and potatoes have a good amount of potassium which helps regulate blood pressure.

Remember, no one fruit or vegetable family, or color is best. The healthiest diet consists of a wide variety of different fruits and vegetables to get the best mix of health promoting nutrients.

#### Snack healthy:

Fruits and veggies are a tasty, healthy snack and are also convenient and portable. Fruit has been called "nature's fast food," because all you need to do is grab a piece and go. Dried fruit, apples, bananas, carrots or a fruit and yogurt smoothie are quick healthy snacks that help you get more produce in your day.

#### Sample the seasons:

While many fruits and vegetables are available all year long, nothing beats the taste of freshly picked fruits like apples in the fall. Also, try fall pomegranates, or acorn squash. Spring is an ideal time to try apricots, mangos, or collard greens. The flavor of vine ripened summer tomatoes is always a treat. Blueberries, kiwis, and summer squash complement the summer weather. Lastly, in winter go for cauliflower, mushrooms, and sweet potatoes.

Turn to fruits and vegetables for a tasty, nourishing and important part of your daily diet. Produce is a 'super-food' that is naturally low in fat and calories and is packed with nutrition. Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables at each meal to make sure that you're getting at least 5-9 servings daily to help reduce your risk of chronic diseases and manage your weight. If you want to make a difference in your health, eat more produce!



Since everyone's health history and nutritional needs are so different, please make sure that you talk with your doctor and a registered dietitian to get advice about the diet and exercise plan that's right for you.