

This resource has been adapted with permission by the YES I Can! Science team from:

The Lifestyle Journey

Ideas for People Inc., www.ideasforpeople.com

The Back-To-Basics Healthy Eating Guide



Choose Fruit and Vegetables



When it comes to this food group, your mother is right – veggies and fruit are really good for you. You need to eat them every day to be healthy. It's as simple as that! In fact, every day, you need to eat a minimum of 5 servings of fruit and vegetables. And, while that may seem like a lot of fruit and veggies, you will see from examples in this Foundation Strategy just how easy it is to get your 5 servings.

Fruit and vegetables make up one of the four (4) basic food groups. As a basic food group, they are a significant cornerstone in your foundation for healthy eating. Fruits and vegetables are terrific sources of many different nutrients including many vitamins and minerals. Here's a short list to give you a few examples:

Vitamin C, A, E, B2, pantothenic acid, Vitamin B6, folic acid, biotin, calcium, potassium, sodium, and copper.

Fruit and vegetables can also contain fibre, carbohydrates, and some are also good sources of protein.

Fruits and vegetables also contain compounds called phytonutrients and antioxidants, which may have certain health benefits when it comes to helping prevent certain diseases such as cancer or heart disease. Health and nutrition experts are continuing to do more research in this area to learn more about these types of compounds.

It is simply common sense to make sure that fruit and vegetables are a big part of your daily eating. However, sometimes common sense isn't all that common. Most people just don't eat enough of this food group. Why is that? Is it because of taste or appearance or because a lot of people "learned" to dislike vegetables when they were young? While these may be some of the reasons why people don't eat enough fruits and veggies, there are just too many healthy nutrients contained in this food group not to eat them.

To get your 5 servings, or more, you need to try to include a fruit or vegetable at each meal and for at least one snack during the day. Here are a few points to think about:

- Fruits and vegetables come in a wide variety of colours – green, yellow, orange, red, and a few shades in between. Some of these colours contain certain nutrients and other healthy ingredients that other colours don't. Because of this, it's important to try and have a variety of different colours of vegetables, and fruit, on a regular basis.
- You will need to take some responsibility here in order to get more fruits and vegetables into your daily eating. You will need to take control. Get involved in helping to plan and prepare meals, in addition to helping to plan the grocery shopping. You may have to tell your parents that eating more of this food group is one of your healthy eating goals.
- When it comes to shopping, the main thing is to plan ahead. Plan what kinds of fruit and vegetables you need to buy each week. Fresh, frozen or canned, all of these kinds are fine. But with canned fruit (and some veggies), be aware of added sugar or other unhealthy additives or ingredients. Read the label – if you see sugar listed there, then put it back on the shelf and find one without added sugar.
- You should know the way vegetables are prepared – for example, whether they are eaten raw or cooked – can change how nutritious they are. When cooking vegetables, it is best if they are lightly steamed. They should be softened, but still “crunchy” or “crisp”. Boil vegetables in a small amount of water for a short amount of time as an alternative. Eating your veggies raw is great too, and it can be a good “workout” for your teeth and jaw muscles.
- Fruit is great as part of a meal, or for dessert or a snack, because it needs little, if any, preparation (except maybe washing or peeling). Fruit is tasty, easy and fun to eat. It makes a great snack for when you're “on the go”.
- Generally, vegetables like potatoes and fruit like pears or peaches are more nutritious when the skin is eaten as well. There are vitamins and minerals in the skin as well as fibre, which promotes good digestion. As much as possible, try to eat your fruit and veggies with the skin. Obviously, wash them well first. But you'll still have to peel your bananas, right?
- Live on the edge – be adventurous and try new kinds of fruits and vegetables that you have never had. See the list at the end of this section for fruits and veggies that are very nutritious. You'll probably find something in those lists that you've never tried before.
- Go easy on the added stuff – people do all kinds of things to their veggies like loading up on salad dressings, mayonnaise, salt, butter, cheese sauce, dips, or

gravy. These added foods can often add a lot of “empty calories”. Instead, try some new recipes or ways of preparing your veggies that don’t involve adding a lot of sugar, fat, or salt. Try eating your fruit and veggies in their most basic form – raw or lightly steamed. Experiment with adding herbs and spices or lemon juice or vinegar or don’t put anything on them – just enjoy the delicious, natural taste.

- About fruit juice – orange, apple, grape, grapefruit – a small cup or glass of these juices can be considered a serving of fruit. But you have to make sure you are drinking 100% juice and not just a fruit-flavoured drink. These kinds of drinks are usually nothing more than sugar and flavouring – either artificial or natural. They may contain a small amount of actual fruit juice, but they are often mostly water with added sugar. Look for the words “unsweetened” or “no sugar added” on the juice container. Even though juice can be considered a serving of fruit, limit your juice drinking to one small glass a day. The reason for this is that fruit juice does not contain any natural fibre, unlike actual pieces of fruit, which are healthier choices.

As you know, there are a huge variety of fruits and vegetables. Virtually all fruits and vegetables have some value when it comes to nutrition and healthy eating. However, not all foods in this group were created equal; some are more nutritious than others. But how do you know which ones are the healthiest to eat? In the lists below, you will see fruits and vegetables that are considered to be good sources of Vitamin A, Vitamin C, potassium, folic acid, iron, calcium and fibre. See *Lunchbox # 1* at the end of this section for an explanation of why these nutrients are important to your health. The foods in each list are not ranked in any particular order.

FRUIT

Sources of Vitamin A: Cantaloupe, Papaya, Guava, Mango, Prunes, Watermelon, Grapefruit, Persimmon, Tangerines, Apricots.

Sources of Vitamin C: Cantaloupe, Mango, Oranges, Grapefruit, Strawberries, Papaya, Honeydew Melon, Watermelon, Guava, Kiwi, Grapes.

Sources of Potassium: Papaya, Kiwi, Cantaloupe, Dried Apricots, Cantaloupe, Honeydew Melon, Banana, Dried Currents, Pomegranate, Apricots, Apples.

Sources of Folic Acid: Papaya, Oranges, Cantaloupe, Pear, Strawberries, Raspberries, Tangerines, Banana, Avocado, Apricots.

Sources of Fibre: Raspberries, Apple, Pear, Banana, Peach, Cherries, Oranges, Dried Figs (or Apricots or Prunes), Guava, Kiwi.

The Top Five Fruits (based on the above lists): Cantaloupe, Strawberries, Guava, Papaya, Honeydew Melon.

VEGETABLES

Sources of Vitamin A: Collard greens, Spinach, Sweet Potato, Kale, Swiss Chard, Carrots, Sweet Red Pepper, Pumpkin, Romaine Lettuce, Squash.

Sources of Vitamin C: Sweet Red Pepper, Broccoli, Brussel Sprouts, Sweet Potato, Kale, Baked Potatoes (with skin), Cauliflower, Swiss Chard, Cabbage, Green Pepper.

Sources of Potassium: Baked Potato (with skin), Boston/Leaf Lettuce, Romaine Lettuce, Callard Greens, Tomato, Brussel Sprouts, Broccoli, Spinach, Potato without skin, Mushrooms.

Sources of Folic Acid: Spinach, Asparagus, Romaine Lettuce, Collard Greens, Brussel Sprouts, Corn, Broccoli, Cauliflower, parsnip, Baked Potato (with skin).

Sources of Iron: Spinach, Swiss Chard, Pumpkin, Baked Potato (with skin), Snow Peas, Beets, Mushrooms, Collard Greens, Green Beans, Sweet Potato.

Sources of Calcium: Collard Greens, Spinach, Kale, Swiss Chard, Okra, Snow Peas, Rutabaga, Sweet Potato, Broccoli, Pumpkin.

Sources of Fibre: Baked Potato (with skin), Green Peas, Sweet Potato, Collard Greens, Pumpkin, Carrots, Corn, Broccoli, Artichoke, Squash.

The Top 5 Vegetables (based on the above lists): Broccoli, Sweet Potato, Spinach, Collard Greens, Swiss Chard.

Here are a few possibilities to show you how you can get more fruits and veggies from these lists into your daily eating. Remember that you want a total of at least 5 servings for the day:

Breakfast

- 4 oz. Orange Juice – 1 serving
- ½ - 1 cup of fresh fruit (you could even cut it up to add to your cereal) – 1 serving.

Lunch

- 1 piece of fruit with lunch (as dessert) – your choice – 1 serving
- 1-2 cups of sliced carrots, celery, cucumber, or some other type of raw vegetable – 1 serving.
- Add a good sized helping of lettuce, tomato, or some other sliced vegetable to your favourite sandwich – 1 serving.
- 1 bowl of vegetable soup – ½ serving.
- Snack – have a second piece of fruit for a mid-afternoon or after school snack – 1 serving.

Dinner Examples (there are endless combinations here)

- 1 baked potato (eating the skin is more nutritious) with 1 cup of steamed vegetables of your choice – 2 servings.
- Pizza loaded with veggies (approx. 1 serving depending on the number of veggies on it and how many pieces you eat).
- Pasta with chunks of vegetables in a tomato-based sauce – approx. 1 serving.

A few other suggestions...

- Try mixing fruit into your yogurt or having it on top of breakfast cereal.
- Make a fruit “smoothie” from fruit, ice and milk in the blender.
- Combine vegetables into other dishes or recipes like soups, casseroles or other “one-dish” meals where the flavour of the veggies tend to blend into the overall taste of the dish – chili, macaroni and cheese, tuna casserole, spaghetti sauce, lasagna, stew, soup, or pizza. In this case, you may not even know you’re eating them.
- Virtually all fruits and veggies make healthy choices as snacks or part of meals except for things like avocado, sweetened fruit juice and French fries, which should be chosen only once in a while.
- Remember that preparation is very important – avoid added sugar, salt, and fat as much as possible.
- Avoid frying, deep frying or boiling. Steaming is best.
- Dried beans, peas, lentils, are vegetables that re good protein sources, especially when combined with a whole grain. These can be consumed as part of another dish such as chili, spaghetti sauce or bean salad.
- The large majority of fruits and vegetables, save for a few choices, contain little or no fat or cholesterol.

There are various reasons why people dislike fruits and vegetables:

- Your parents don’t like them, so eating them is not a priority in your house. However, rather than blame your dislike of vegetables on your parents, it’s up to you to take control and choose to eat more of these foods.
- Poor preparation could make them over-cooked and mushy.
- There is no variety – just the same old fruits and vegetables all the time.
- You didn’t learn to like vegetables and fruit as a little kid.

In summary, keep it basic. Keep your commitment to that healthy eating foundation. Choose health – Choose more Fruits and Vegetables. And don’t say that we didn’t warn you that your mother was right!

Choose health – Eat enough fruit and vegetables every day.



Lunchbox # 1: Vitamins, Minerals and Fibre

Vitamin A contributes to healthy skin, bones, teeth, and helps maintain good vision. Fruits and veggies actually contain a compound called Beta-Carotene, which your body uses to make Vitamin A.

Vitamin C is involved in the development of your teeth, gums, bones and cartilage. Some researchers also believe that a diet high in Vitamin C can help ward off colds and may help prevent cancer and some other diseases.

Folic Acid is an important vitamin. It is involved in helping the body to produce both red and white blood cells. It also plays a role in building RNA and DNA, which is the basic genetic material, from which your body is formed.

Potassium is involved in how your body's cells "communicate". It is especially important in the transmission of nerve impulses. It is also involved in muscle contractions.

Calcium, as you know, is crucial in building healthy bones and teeth. It is also involved in helping your blood to clot (so that you stop bleeding if you cut yourself, for example). Calcium also plays a role in many other cellular functions.

Iron has an important role as part of a compound called hemoglobin, which is found in your red blood cells. Hemoglobin carries oxygen to your body's cells.

Fibre is not a vitamin or a mineral. In fact, it isn't even considered a nutrient. However, it is essential for good health. Fibre in your daily eating helps promote good digestion. (It keeps ya regular, if you know what I mean?). High fibre eating makes sure that the food you eat doesn't stay in your system for very long. For example, if your diet is low in fibre, the food you eat today may not pass through your system and be excreted for maybe 2 or 3 days. During that time, that food sits in your intestines where it could have a toxic affect. However, when you eat a lot of fibre, the food you eat goes through your system in much less time. In this way, nutrition experts believe that fibre can reduce the risk of some diseases such as colon cancer. Nutrition experts recommend an intake of 20-25 grams of fibre per day.