

HEALTHFUL TIPS

Up Your Fruit & Vegetable Intake



We all know that we should eat more fresh fruits and vegetables, but it can be hard when there are other enticing foods available. What we choose to eat each day is often a combination of habits and the foods that are readily available. Changing habits takes effort, but if you are ready to take the next step towards good health, here are some ideas to get you started.

COLOR VARIETY. Different groups of fruits and vegetables provide different health benefits. By choosing a variety of fruit and vegetable colors, your nutritional intake will improve. Studies also indicate that we eat more when there is more variety available to us. And in the case of fresh fruits and vegetables, most of us need to eat more.

MAKE IT CONVENIENT. Keep fruits and vegetables in plain sight. A bowl or basket of fresh apples, pears, bananas and oranges on the kitchen counter and a see-through container of fresh-cut vegetables in the refrigerator makes it easy to grab a healthy snack. Along that same principle, put sugary or processed snack foods out of sight and out of mind, or better yet don't buy them.

DIP 'EM. Add some flavor with low-fat ranch dressing, low-fat French onion dip, low-fat cheese dip, quesadilla dip, no-added-sugar yogurt, cream cheese and fresh fruit blended dip.

GO WITH FROZEN. Freezing fruits and vegetables can actually help them to maintain their nutritional value. There is also the added benefit of a long shelf life. Some of the vegetable blends available now have low-fat butter, cheese sauce and seasonings for those who don't enjoy their vegetables naked. They come in microwave steamer bags—no need even to dirty a pan or bowl. Frozen strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, peaches, pineapple, and mixed fruits can be found without additives. Pop a serving in your blender with some milk or yogurt for a thick, rich smoothie. Add some protein powder and you have a protein-packed breakfast or snack.

CONVENIENCE. Pre-cut fresh vegetables and fruit are available in larger grocery stores. These can be a great time-saving option if you are planning on consuming them within a few days. This convenient option makes it easy to add chopped onions, broccoli florets, celery, and other vegetables to a spinach or lettuce salad, sandwich or soup. Putting together a fresh-cut fruit bowl or platter is a cinch.

ON THE GO. Take carrot, celery and pepper sticks, fresh fruit, and applesauce or packaged fruit cups.

EAT OUT. In restaurants, order salads; vegetables in place of potatoes; vegetarian wraps; fruit platters; extra lettuce, tomato and onion on your sandwich; vegetable soup; or vegetarian entrees.

GO ON THE WILD SIDE. Select some fruits and vegetables that you have never tried before. Japanese zucchini, star fruit, pomegranate, pitaya, Romanesco cauliflower, cape broccoli, and Chinese artichoke are a few that you might try.

BUY FRESH. A trip to the local farmer's market is fun, helps the local economy, saves on transportation fuel, and will provide you with the freshest fruits and vegetables.

VEGGIES FOR BREAKFAST? Sure, just add vegetables like bell peppers, broccoli, spinach, mushrooms, or tomatoes to scrambled eggs, egg substitute or omelet.

SOUP'S ON. Put a pot of soup on and add in the veggies.

DINNER TIME. Add more veggies to your evening meal with stir fries, vegetarian lasagna, pasta primavera, or a slice of veggie-topped pizza.

STOCK UP. Watch for sales on canned fruit (packed in juice or water) and vegetables. Use these when produce prices are high.

DESSERT TIME. Sugar-free gelatin with fresh fruit, fruit layered with yogurt or no-added-sugar pudding, low-sugar cereal with fresh fruit, and frozen grapes are sweet, delicious and nutritious options.