

More matters with fruits and vegetables

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Did you know September is Fruits & Veggies More Matters Month? For adults, seven to 13 servings of fruits and vegetables a day are recommended, but unfortunately, many Americans are not reaching this goal. Getting adequate fruits and veggies every day may protect us from disease, help us to maintain a healthy weight, and provide us with key nutrients. More than 200 different varieties of fruits and vegetables exist in many colors, shapes, sizes and flavors.

Fruits and veggies can be great sources of calcium, fiber, folate, iron, magnesium, potassium, Vitamin A, Vitamin C and Vitamin K. These nutrients are important for healthy bones, teeth and blood, cell function, healthy blood pressure, eyes and skin, oral health, protection against infection and healing cuts and wounds. Fighting disease the fruit and vegetable way is easy; you just need to eat more, and a variety of fruits and vegetables. You may even decrease risk of cancer, diabetes, heart disease and stroke with the right choices. Disease-fighting choices include berries, cruciferous vegetables (broccoli/cauliflower), green leafy veggies, grapes, orange vegetables (carrots/sweet potatoes), tomatoes and starchy veggies like potatoes, corn and dry beans.

Fresh, frozen, canned, dried, and 100 percent juices are the different forms of fruits and veggies and all types matter! For optimum nutrition, eat a variety of fruits and veggies in different forms, because some nutrients are more available from cooked foods and others are more available from fresh. A serving of fruit is equivalent to about ½ cup of fresh fruit, ¼ cup of dried fruit or 1 cup of fruit juice. A serving of vegetables is about ½ cup of raw or cooked vegetables, 1 cup of raw leafy greens or 1 cup of vegetable juice. Make fruits and vegetables half of what you eat for every meal and snack, and you should be able to meet your estimated needs. Following are more ideas to help you increase your intake.

1. Marinate favorite vegetables just as you would meats and grill/roast until golden brown.
2. Add vegetables to soups, salads, omelets or egg/tofu scrambles.
3. Snack on carrots, celery, red bell pepper, cauliflower, cucumber or other veggies dipped in hummus, salsa, black bean dip or light vinaigrette dressing.
4. When making rice, add frozen corn, peas, and/or carrots to the rice cooker or pot.
5. Top pizza with a variety of sliced or chopped peppers, mushrooms, artichoke hearts, tomatoes, onions, spinach or zucchini instead of meat.
6. Dip fruit into low fat fruit yogurt for a snack.
7. Make a yogurt parfait with layers of low fat yogurt, fruit (fresh, canned or frozen and thawed) and low fat granola.
8. Slice berries, peaches or bananas over hot or cold cereal.
9. Add dry fruit to cereal or trail mix.
10. Choose fresh fruit or veggies for a snack.

Take the challenge! Add more fruits and vegetables to your daily diet. Choose a variety of colors and flavors for the maximum health benefit! For additional fruit and veggie information, visit www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org. For a personalized food guide, visit www.MyPyramid.gov.