Increasing Your Intake of Fruits and Vegetables

The 2010 Dietary Guidelines recommend 9 servings a day -- 2 1/2 cups vegetables and 2 cups fruit. Eating nine servings a day is a challenge, but the benefits are worth it as eating more fruits and vegetables increases the quality of your diet. Fruits and vegetables are naturally low in calories, high in fiber, and contain many vitamins and minerals in addition to healthy phytochemicals including antioxidants and they taste good too. Because they naturally contain a lot of water, that water can count as part of the fluids that you need each day.

In selecting produce:

a) Eat as wide a variety of fresh produce as possible to get the greatest variety of vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals. If you are someone who likes only a limited number of fruits and vegetables, there is nothing like the PRESENT to start to taste and come to enjoy a greater variety. Sampling new cuisines in ethnic restaurants, asking your friends for their favorite recipes, and trying a new method of cookery can help. Branch out and expand your horizons!

b) Go for COLOR (interior color)-- the dark greens, deep yellows, and deep oranges are the most nutrient dense choices.

c) If the skin is edible, eat the skin. This will add to the fiber content, and many of the vitamins and minerals are just under the skin.

d) If a fruit or vegetable is high in Vitamin C, it is best to prepare it just before eating as Vitamin C is susceptible to diminishing in value with light, heat, and air.

e) In cooking produce, cook as quickly as possible, and in as little water as possible to retain the B vitamins which are water soluble. Save the cooking water to use in soups or other food preparations.

f) Prior to cooking or eating, rinse produce well under cold running water.

g) Remember that if you are going to eat more produce, you need to buy more produce. Fortunately, you can store canned vegetables or fruits in your cupboard, and frozen ones in your freezer for times when you cannot purchase fresh produce.

h) What is a serving? A half cup -- about as much as you can hold in your hand. For leafy greens, the amount increases to one cup.

If the produce is fresh:

a) Eat fruits and vegetables in season for the best flavor and the best price. Midseason seems to be the best for flavorful fruits. By the end of the season, flavor and texture fall off.

b) Buy fresh produce several times a week, and only in quantities that you and your family are able to eat. The nutrient content of fresh produce begins to diminish once it is picked. Locally grown produce will be higher in nutrient value than produce trucked in for many miles assuming that your local market has a high turnover of its produce.
c) For the best flavor, buy small or medium sizes. Smaller pieces of produce are also more reasonable in size. For example, a large apple may be the equivalent of two small apples.
d) Handle fresh produce carefully as damage and bruising hasten spoilage.
e) Consider choosing your own produce rather than buying it in prepared packages so you can select the produce of the highest quality.
f) For the highest nutrient retention, buy whole pieces of vegetables instead of cut-up pieces. If your time is at a premium, buying cup-up produce at the market is better than not buying any produce at all.
g) Bruised or wilted produce will have a lower nutrient density.
h) Fresh tomatoes in season have the best flavor. Leave at room temperature as refrigerating them can blunt their flavor and make them mushy. Arrange in a single layer with the stems up and out of direct sunlight; piling them on top of each other can be too much for their delicate skin.
i) For storing corn on the cob, shuck first and then store in plastic bags in your refrigerator for maximum flavor and freshness.

If the produce is canned or frozen:
a) Canned and frozen produce is processed immediately after being harvested, and can contain more nutrients than produce that has been trucked for many miles, and then stored in your refrigerator. On the other hand, fresh produce that is cooked quickly in a small amount of water, and eaten right away is as nutritious as canned or frozen produce.
b) In the processing process, salt may be added which increases the sodium content, fat may be added as part of a sauce, and/or sugar may be added to fruit. Check the nutritional labeling on the product for that information.
b) It is judicious to have canned produce in your cupboard, and frozen produce in your freezer for days when you are unable to get to the market.
c) Texture will change with canned and frozen produce, so decide which of these vegetables and fruits are acceptable to your taste. In the depths of winter, canned tomatoes are perfect for cooking and have wonderful full flavors. There are vegetables in the freezer section of your grocery store which are cut up and ready for cooking to save preparation time.
d) Beans such as kidney, pinto, and white can be found in the canned food section. Note the sodium content. The cost for canned beans will be higher than buying dried beans, but preparation is easier.

Dried fruits and beans:
a) Dried fruits are perfect to have in your cupboard and to carry on hikes and picnics or to work without risk of spoilage. Because they have a reduced water content, similar quantities to fresh produce will have more calories.
b) Eat more dry beans and peas like pinto beans, kidney beans, and lentils. To use, you just need to plan ahead to let the beans soak. Lentils do not need to be soaked. Explore ways to eat more beans and lentils. They are an excellent source of fiber.
**Juice versus the whole fruit:**

a) People used to drink juice just for breakfast, but now they drink juice and juice drinks all day long.

b) Juices may have more calories than the same amount of a soda. Juice is often packaged in 16 oz containers which is a much larger volume than the 4 oz glass of juice that used to be the normal breakfast serving.

c) Juice has more calories per ounce than the whole fruit.

d) Juice lacks the fiber of whole fruit. Fiber is filling. Drinking juice fills you only momentarily.

e) If you are trying to control calories, eat the whole fruit or vegetable or just stick with a small glass at breakfast. Canned vegetable juice can be a good snack, lower in calories, but note the sodium content which may be higher.

d) If a juice has “beverage”, “ade”, “cocktail”, or “drink” in its name on the label, it is not 100% juice, and other ingredients such as sugar have been added. Sometimes apple, grape or pear juice has been added to replace sugar; these are not as nutritious as 100% juice.

e) To cut the calories in juice healthfully, add mineral water.

f) Juice and juice drinks (as well as sodas) are not satiating according to research at Purdue University by Richard Mattes. These will be added calories to your day as they will not help to decrease the calories at the next meal as calories eaten as solid food will do.

**Purchasing Organically Grown and Produced Produce**

Purchasing organic produce is good for the environment and also for your health as it lowers pesticides but does not completely irradicate them. According to Nature’s Path Consumer Services, organic farmers replace toxic chemical pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers with agricultural methods that improve soil fertility and biological diversity. Weeds and insects are controlled by crop rotation, cultivation, mulching, manure spreading, and the encouragement of insects that keep the pests in check. These farming methods produce less toxic run-off, have less soil erosion, and more variety of animal species and microorganisms in their fields.

To reduce being exposed to pesticides, consult the Environmental Working Group (EWG) Shopper’s Guide for the Dirty Dozen to understand which fruits and vegetables are best to buy organic, and the Clean 15 which are the lowest in pesticides. Wash fruits and vegetables, whether organic or not. There are also suggestions to peel them but this is an issue of “benefit versus risk” as the peeling is high in fiber and many of the nutrients are just under the skin.

**HOW MANY FRUITS AND VEGETABLES SERVINGS DO YOU EAT EACH DAY?** (In general, a serving is ½ cup fruit or vegetables, or 1 cup of raw salad greens, or ¼ cup dried fruit.)
BREAKFAST:

MORNING SNACK:

LUNCH:

MID-AFTERNOON SNACK:

DINNER:

AFTER DINNER SNACK (IF YOU HAVE ONE):

How many total servings are you eating each day? If you need to increase your consumption of fruits and vegetables, how will you do so?

HOW DOES EATING MORE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES MAKE YOU FEEL?

IF YOU EAT A SNACK OF FRUIT OR VEGETABLE BY ITSELF WITHOUT ANY OTHER FOOD, HOW LONG ARE YOU SATISFIED BEFORE YOU WANT TO EAT AGAIN?

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