

Health Tip: Fruits & Vegetables

According to the CDC, almost everyone needs to eat more fruits and vegetables. Less than one third of adults get their recommended value. March is National Nutrition Month and a great time to evaluate your diet. To find out how many servings of fruits and vegetables you should eat, use the calculator at www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov

Fruits and vegetables are low in calories and high in vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals, and fiber. A diet including fruit and vegetables can help ward off heart disease and stroke, as well as control blood pressure and cholesterol. According to two Harvard studies, increasing fruit and vegetable intake by as little as one serving per day can have a positive impact on heart disease risk.

- A diet rich in fruits and vegetables appears to reduce the chances of developing cataract or macular degeneration, two common causes of vision loss.
- Free radicals generated by sunlight, cigarette smoke, air pollution, infection, and metabolism cause much damage. Dark green leafy vegetables contain two pigments that appear to be able to kill free radicals before they can harm the eye's sensitive tissues.
- Fruits and vegetables pack fewer calories for the equivalent volume of processed foods; a diet high in these ingredients helps people maintain a healthy weight.
- A component of fruits and vegetables is indigestible fiber, which can help calm the irritable bowel and trigger regular bowel movements.
- Eating more fruit probably lowers the risk of cancers of the esophagus, stomach and lung, and possibly reduces the risk of cancers of the mouth, pharynx, colon-rectum, larynx, kidney, and urinary bladder.

Instead of adding fruits and vegetables to what you usually eat, try substituting fruits and vegetables for higher-calorie foods in your diet.

- Most healthy eating plans allow for one or two small snacks a day. A medium-sized apple is 72 calories. A medium-sized banana is 105 calories. A cup of blueberries is 83 calories and a cup of grapes is 100 calories. One cup of carrots is 45 calories.
- Cut back on the amount of cereal in your bowl to make room for cut-up fruit. Add vegetables to your sandwich or wrap at lunch. Vegetables, fruits and whole grains should take up the largest portion of your dinner plate. Eat a salad as a meal 1-2 times a week.
- 100% juices are a convenient way for adults and children to get part of their recommended fruits and vegetables each day. Check the package labels; nutritionally, not all juices are created equal.
- Pack dehydrated fruit, carrots and celery for snacks. Keep fruit in plain view on your countertop and keep the cookie jar out of sight.
- Eating fresh fruits and vegetables in a variety of colors is a good way to ensure you get the assortment of minerals and vitamins you need.
- Look for seasonal varieties for the best flavor and value. This spring some good choices include artichokes, apricots, arugula, asparagus, cherries, fava beans, lemons, peas, strawberries, sweet onions and green garlic.

Sources: CDC, World Health Organization, Harvard School of Public Health, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, LifeWork Strategies, and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. The Health Tip of the Week is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Please feel free to copy and distribute this health resource.