

THE VALUE OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

We all have childhood memories of our parents telling us to eat our vegetables before we could be excused from the table—and then trying to hide our Brussels sprouts under the napkin or feed them to the dog. This is sometimes a constant battle with children and even adults. The number of Americans meeting adequate fruit consumption guidelines is just under one-third, and this number is even lower when it comes to vegetables. That's a far cry from the Healthy People 2010 goals, which include 75% of Americans eating two servings of fruit and 50% of Americans eating three servings of vegetables daily.

The Benefits

Fruits and vegetables are beneficial for almost anyone. They are low in calories, but dense in nutrients and fiber. This makes them ideal for a filling snack or meal. In addition to vitamins and minerals, plant foods are abundant in phytochemicals, which are special nutrients that may have cancer-fighting properties. Research has shown that people who eat more fruits and vegetables have a lower risk of diseases like stroke, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers and coronary heart disease. Fruits and vegetables should be an integral part of a weight-control diet, a training diet and an everyday diet.

How much is enough?

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend 2 cups of fruit and 2½ cups of vegetables for a 2000-calorie diet. But how many people know that they actually eat a 2000-calorie diet? MyPyramid.gov is a great resource to monitor your food intake and see how many fruits and vegetables you need based on your age, gender, height, weight and physical-activity level. Whole fruits are recommended above fruit juice, which lacks fiber and is much less filling. Vegetables are categorized into five subgroups, and you should try to eat the recommended amount of each group throughout the week.



Whether you're eating fresh, canned, frozen or dried fruits and vegetables, try to get a variety into your diet. You'll get a wider variety of nutrients and avoid the potential monotony associated with eating the same foods—which is one major reason people tend to stray from their eating plans.

Getting Started

Besides health benefits, fruits and vegetables are easy to prepare—all you have to do is wash them! Many fruits and vegetables can be taken to eat on the go and are great for quick, tasty snacks.

When fruits and vegetables are in season, consuming them fresh and raw is optimal for getting the maximum amount of nutrition. For fruits and vegetables that are out of season,

frozen or canned may be more nutritious. The fruits and vegetables that go into these products are picked at the height of their nutritional value and the process of freezing and canning them preserves most of the nutrients. Try to avoid canned fruits packed in syrup, as the sugar content is very high.

Fruits and vegetables can easily be served as a side dish or dessert, or incorporated into the main entrée. Try adding dried or fresh berries to your salads or cereal. Grilling fruits is a great way to enhance their sweetness without adding sugar. Vegetable medleys can be cooked into casseroles or stir fried with noodles or rice. Substitute your favorite meat pizza toppings with some veggies. There are a plethora of recipes available online and in cookbooks where you can get more great ideas.

Additional Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2007). Fruit and vegetable consumption among adults: United States, 2005. *Mortality and Morbidity Report*, 56, 10, 213–217: www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5610a2.htm?s_cid=mm5610a2_e

2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans: www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines

MyPyramid.gov: www.MyPyramid.gov

Healthy People 2010: www.healthypeople.gov

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at www.acefitness.org/GetFit and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts!™

Vegetable Group	Recommended Weekly Amount*	Examples
Dark green	3 cups	Broccoli, romaine lettuce, spinach
Orange	2 cups	Carrots, sweet potatoes, acorn squash
Legumes (dry beans)	3 cups	Black beans, tofu, garbanzo beans
Starchy	3 cups	Corn, green peas, potatoes
Other	6½ cups	Artichoke, asparagus, eggplant, mushrooms

*Based on a 2000-calorie diet



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