

The Edible Rainbow



Whether fresh, frozen, canned, dried, or 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice, hundreds of sensations are waiting to tempt your smell and taste buds. Research shows that the nutrients in fruits and vegetables may decrease the risk of certain chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. More actually matters when choosing from the rainbow of fruits and vegetables. Along with a balanced diet, it is important to participate in a minimum of 30 minutes of physical activity each day.

What Is a Fruit?

Fruit is the ripened, seed-bearing part of a flowering plant that can be eaten. The most popular fruits in America are bananas, apples, oranges, and grapes. But mangoes, kiwi, and other exotic fruits are becoming more popular. Brighter colored fruits are higher in nutrients.

What Is a Vegetable?

The definition of a vegetable is a plant grown for an edible part, such as the roots or leaves. The most popular vegetables in America are lettuce, tomatoes, onions, carrots, and celery. But chayote squash, bok choy, and other exotic vegetables are becoming increasingly popular as well. Dark green, leafy vegetables and brightly colored vegetables are higher in nutrients.

Fruits and vegetables are nature's perfect convenience food. They are low in calories and chock-full of nutrients your body needs. Produce is a nutrient-dense food, so you get more nutrients for fewer calories.

The Produce for Better Health Foundation (www.5aday.com) first introduced 5-a-Day in the mid-1990s, to motivate everyone to eat more fruits and vegetables. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, MyPyramid, and the American Dietetic Association also encourage consumption of more. With additional proof everyday of health benefits, the new slogan is: "Fruits and Vegetables, More Matters™".

Key Vitamins in Fruits

The two key vitamins in fruits are vitamin A and vitamin C. Vitamin A is found in the brightly orange, yellow, or red mango, cantaloupe, apricots, and papaya. If children and parents don't get enough vitamin A, then night blindness, dry eyes, poor growth, and dry skin could occur. Vitamin A is a fat-soluble vitamin, so it can be stored in the body if excess is eaten. Vitamin C is a water-soluble vitamin and is usually not stored over time. This is why the daily diet should contain the recommended amount of vitamin C. Excellent sources of vitamin C are the brightly colored orange, yellow, red, and green kiwi, citrus fruits, strawberries, and papaya. Vitamin C is needed to keep hair, skin, and nails healthy. A deficiency leads to a decrease in immune function.

Key Vitamins in Vegetables

The four key vitamins are A, C, K, and folate in vegetables. Vitamin A can be found in brightly colored orange or green vegetables such as carrots, broccoli, spinach, or squash. Vitamin C is found in green vegetables, cauliflower, and potatoes. Good sources of vitamin K are cauliflower, greens, broccoli, and potatoes. Vitamin K helps make fibrinogen, which allows blood to clot. Folate can be found in asparagus, romaine lettuce, spinach, and broccoli. Folate helps red blood cells carry oxygen to other cells and helps make DNA.



What about Fiber?

Fruits and vegetables are a great source of fiber. The type of fiber in produce is called soluble fiber. Soluble fiber either dissolves or swells when put in water. Fiber delays gastric emptying, slows glucose absorption, decrease blood cholesterol, and can help prevent colon cancer. Currently it is suggested that adults consume 20 to 35 grams of fiber per day. This averages to about 14 grams of dietary fiber for every 1,000 calories of food consumed.

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/fiber.html>

Some products have different amounts of fiber even though they are made from the same fruit.

Apple with skin	4 grams
Applesauce	1 gram
Flavored applesauce	2 grams
Apple fruit roll-up	0 grams

Minerals

Minerals such as calcium, chromium, copper, iron, magnesium, manganese, potassium, selenium, and zinc are also found in fruits and vegetables in varying amounts. Many of these minerals act as antioxidants, helping protect cells in the body, and reducing the risks of cardiovascular disease, cancer, cataracts, premature aging, and impaired immunity.

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Research indicates that each nutrient has a unique function in our body, and although we may not know exactly how or why nutrients work the way they do, it is clear

that more fruits and vegetables reduces the risk of many chronic diseases.

One of the ways to make good choices when filling up your plate is to choose farm-fresh produce in a variety of colors. Fill your plate from the edible rainbow of fruits and vegetables including red, green, yellow, orange, blue, purple, and white. Next time you visit your local farmers market, look for a variety of colors to fill your basket. Here's my favorite edible rainbow list - kale greens, ruby red strawberries, yellow peppers, orange sweet potatoes, purple eggplant, white cauliflower. What would your edible rainbow look like?

Replacing higher calorie, less nutrient-dense foods such as the bag of corn chips can help you reduce your caloric intake while increasing your fruit and vegetable intake.



One snack-size bag (1 ounce) of corn chips has about the same calories as 1 apple + 1 cup of strawberries + 1 cup of carrots AND ¼ cup of low-calorie dip.

Try replacing your favorite snack food with a fresh fruit or vegetable just once a day, and within six weeks it will become easier for you to choose these healthful foods. Fruits and vegetables add flavor to any dish, whether it's served at breakfast, lunch, or dinner.



Super Star Chef is a joint effort of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service Family and Consumer Sciences and 4-H Youth Development.



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