

The Health Benefits of Eating Fruits and Vegetables

A growing body of research shows that fruits and vegetables are critical to promoting good health. They contain essential vitamins, minerals and fiber that may help protect you from chronic diseases, including stroke and perhaps other cardiovascular diseases and certain cancers. The National Cancer Institute, a branch of the National Institutes of Health, recommends that a person eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

What to Eat

In selecting your daily intake of fruits and vegetables, the National Cancer Institute suggests you chose:

- At least one serving of a vitamin A-rich fruit or vegetable a day
- At least one serving of a vitamin C-rich fruit or vegetable a day
- At least one serving of a high-fiber fruit or vegetable a day
- Several servings of cruciferous vegetables a week (A cruciferous vegetable is one that belongs to the mustard family, which include mustard greens, various cabbages, broccoli, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts)

To get a healthy variety of vitamins, minerals and other daily dietary requirements, think color. Eating fruits and vegetables of different colors provides your body with a wide range of valuable nutrients, like fiber, folate, potassium and vitamins A and C. Some examples include green spinach, orange sweet potatoes, black beans, yellow corn, purple plums, red watermelon or white onions. Variety also is important because some fruits and vegetables provide calcium and iron. Varying choices increases the likelihood of getting all the nutritional advantages of fruits and vegetables.

Nutritional Sources

The following foods are good sources for:

Vitamin A

- Apricots
- Cantaloupe
- Carrots
- Kale
- Collards
- Leaf lettuce
- Mango

- Mustard greens
- Pumpkin
- Romaine lettuce
- Spinach
- Sweet potato
- Winter squash

Vitamin C

- Apricots
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Cantaloupe
- Cauliflower
- Chili peppers
- Collards
- Grapefruit
- Honeydew melon
- Kiwi fruit
- Mango
- Mustard greens
- Orange
- Orange juice
- Pineapple
- Plum
- Potato with skin
- Spinach
- Strawberries
- Bell peppers
- Tangerine
- Tomatoes
- Watermelon

Fiber

- Apple
- Banana
- Blackberries
- Blueberries
- Brussels sprouts
- Carrots
- Cherries
- Cooked beans and peas
- Dates
- Figs
- Grapefruit

- Kiwi
- Orange
- Pear
- Prunes
- Raspberries
- Spinach
- Strawberries
- Sweet potato

Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/nutrition
- National Cancer Institute: www.cancer.gov

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