

## Increasing Your Fruit and Vegetable Intake

As we look ahead to the summer months, this is a perfect time to start incorporating more fruits and vegetables into your diet. Fresh, local produce is becoming more readily available at grocery stores, farmer's markets, or even your own back yard if you're trying your hand at gardening.

We know that fruits and vegetables are high in vitamins, minerals, and fiber, and alternatively, low in calories, fat, and sodium, which can help maintain or reduce body weight. Due to their nutrient density, fruits and vegetables may help lower your risk of developing certain chronic diseases as well. The Dietary Guidelines 2015-2020 recommends that all Americans need to increase their fruit and vegetable intake. For adults, we need approximately 1.5 – 2 cups of fruits and 2 – 3 cups of vegetables per day (MyPlate). Yet, according to 2015 data compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) concerning fruit and vegetable intake in the United States, we are failing to reach the recommended amounts. The study found that less than 18% of adults in each state consumed the recommended amount of fruit, and less than 14% consumed the recommended amount of vegetables.

Adding more fruits and vegetables to your diet can be accomplished by topping certain foods such as pizza, pasta, or sandwiches with extra produce, or packing raw vegetables with dip for a snack or lunch item. Be creative with baked goods too, such as adding apples, bananas, or berries to a favorite muffin recipe. Fruits and vegetables also go great on the grill - grilled mushrooms, peppers, peaches, and pineapple work great for outdoor barbeques.

For the best quality produce, certain fruits and vegetables may need to be stored differently. For produce that needs to be stored in the refrigerator, it should be kept at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below. Examples of foods that should be stored in the fridge include berries, green beans, grapes, cherries, mushrooms, leafy greens, cauliflower, broccoli, and Brussel sprouts. It is recommended to use these produce items within 1-3 days for maximum quality. Some produce is best when it is ripened on the counter first, then refrigerated – avocados, peaches, pears, plums, and kiwi are some examples. After ripening, they can be stored in the fridge for 1-3 days as well. Regarding produce that should be stored at room temperature, examples include citrus fruits, pomegranates, cucumber, onions, peppers, and tomatoes. Refrigeration of these types of produce can cause cold damage or prevent them from ripening to a good flavor and texture. Cucumbers, eggplant, and peppers can be refrigerated for 1 – 3 days if they are used soon after removing from the refrigerator. For a complete list of proper storage for fresh fruits and vegetables, please visit: <http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/fresh-fruit-veggie-month>.

If you are looking for ways to save on produce, consider buying in bulk when items are on sale – for fresh produce used often, a larger-sized bag is usually the better buy. You can also package fruits and vegetables into smaller, snack size servings and store in air-tight containers to make them last longer. Before shopping, check the local newspaper, grocery store websites and apps, and at the store for sales, coupons, and specials that will cut food costs. Also, think about buying produce in its simplest form. Pre-cut, pre-washed, and ready-to-eat foods are convenient, but often cost more than when purchased in their basic forms. Finally, even though it is a great time to stock up on fresh fruits and vegetables, remember that frozen and canned produce can be a healthy and affordable option as well.

Regardless of where you shop, if you're hypothesizing a study concerning the probability of your green thumb (i.e. starting a garden), or if you're just not much on fruits and vegetables, make the attempt to add more produce powerhouses to your diet – you and your health won't regret it.

#### REFERENCES:

<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6426a1.htm>

<http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/fresh-fruit-veggie-month>