

Fruit and Vegetables

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Fruit and vegetables are an important part of your daily diet. They are naturally good and contain vitamins and minerals that can help to keep you healthy. Research shows they can also help protect against some diseases. Most Australians will benefit from eating more fruit and vegetables as part of a well-balanced, regular diet and a healthy active lifestyle.

There are many varieties of fruit and vegetables available and, if you buy them in season, they need not be expensive. Fruit and vegetables may be dried, canned, frozen or fresh. They can be prepared, cooked and served in a variety of ways. Eat five kinds of vegetable and two kinds of fruit every day for good health.

Types of Fruit

Fruit is the sweet, fleshy, edible portion of a plant. It generally contains seeds. Fruits are usually eaten raw, although some varieties can be cooked. They come in a wide variety of colours, shapes and flavours. Common types of fruits that are readily available include:

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 - Pome ? apples and pears
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 - Citrus ? oranges, grapefruits, mandarins and limes
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 - Stonefruit ? nectarines, apricots, peaches and plums
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 - Tropical and exotic ? bananas and mangoes
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 - Berries ? strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, kiwifruit and passionfruit
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 - Melons ? watermelons, rock melons and honey dew melons
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 - Tomatoes and avocados.

Types of Vegetables

Vegetables are often cooked, although some kinds (salad vegetables) are eaten raw. Vegetables are available in many varieties and can be classified into biological groups or ?families?, including:

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- Leafy green ? lettuce, spinach and silverbeet
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- Crucifer ? cabbage, cauliflower, brussel sprouts and broccoli
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- Curcubits ? pumpkin, cucumber and zucchini
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Root ? potato, sweet potato and yam

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Edible plant stem ? celery and asparagus

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Allium ? onion, garlic and shallot

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Legumes - Legumes or pulses contain nutrients that are especially valuable. Legumes need to be cooked before they are eaten; this improves their nutritional quality, aids digestion and eliminates any harmful toxins. Legumes come in many forms including:

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Soy products ? tofu (bean curd) and soybeans

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Legume flours ? chickpea flour (besan), lentil flour and soy flour

Dried beans and peas ? haricot beans, red kidney beans, chickpeas and lentils

Fresh beans and peas ? green peas, green beans, butter beans, broad beans and snow peas.

Vitamins and minerals

Fruits and vegetables contain many vitamins and minerals that are good for your health. These include vitamins A (beta-carotene and riboflavin), B, C and E, folate, magnesium, zinc, phosphorous and folic acid. Research into folic acid shows that it may reduce blood levels of homocysteine, a substance that may be a risk factor for coronary heart disease.

Eat more fruit and vegetables for your health

Fruits and vegetables are low in fat, salt and sugar and provide a good source of dietary fibre. As part of a well-balanced, regular diet and a healthy active lifestyle, a high intake of fruit and vegetables can help:

Reduce obesity and maintain a healthy weight

Lower your cholesterol

Lower your blood pressure

Protect against diseases

Vegetables and fruit contain phytochemicals, or ?plant chemicals?. These biologically active substances can help to protect you from some diseases. Scientific research shows that if you regularly eat lots of fruit and vegetables you have a lower risk of:

Type 2 diabetes

Stroke

Heart (cardiovascular) disease ? when eaten as food, not taken as supplements

Cancer ? some forms, later in life

High blood pressure (hypertension).

Colour is the key to healthy food

Maximum protection comes from eating a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. Eat a rainbow of colourful fruits and vegetables every day to get the full range of health benefits. For example:

Red foods ? like tomatoes and watermelon, contain lycopene, which is thought to be important for fighting

prostate cancer and heart disease.

Green vegetables ? like spinach and kale, contain lutein and zeaxanthin, which may help protect against age-related eye disease.

Blue and purple foods ? like blueberries and eggplant, contain anthocyanins, which may help protect the body from cancer.

White foods ? like cauliflower contain sulforaphane, which may also help protect against cancer.

Seven a day, Every day

Different fruits and vegetables contain different nutrients. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines recommend that adults eat at least five kinds of vegetable and two kinds of fruit every day. Results from a national nutrition survey conducted by the Australian Government indicate that Australians of all ages do not eat enough vegetables and fruit.

Children have a smaller stomach capacity and higher energy needs. They will not be able to eat the same serving sizes as adults; however, they should be encouraged to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables. By eating well, your children will have the energy they need to play, concentrate better, learn, sleep better and build stronger teeth and bones. The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating has recommendations for how many vegetables and fruits children and adolescents of different ages require.

Serving suggestions for your family?s health

Vegetables and fruit are a handy snack food and are easily carried to work or school. Include them in all your family?s meals and most snacks for a healthy well-balanced diet. Some suggestions include:

Keep snack-size fruit and vegetables portions easily accessible in your fridge.

Keep fresh fruit on the bench or table.

Add fruit and vegetables to your favourite family recipes or as additions to your usual menus.

Use the colour and texture of a variety of fruit and vegetables to spice up your meals.

Think up new ways to serve fruits and vegetables, including:

- Fruit and vegetable salads
- Vegetable stir-fries
- Raw fruit and vegetables
- Vegetable soups
- Snack-pack, stewed or canned fruits or dried fruits.

Limit fruit juice, as it does not contain the same amount of nutrients as fresh fruit and contains a lot of sugars, even though they may be ?natural?.

Select for Freshness, Variety and Appeal

When buying and serving fruit and vegetables, go with variety for maximum nutrients and appeal. Select a mix of seasonal fruits and vegetables from the different groups and choose for freshness and quality.

Eat with the seasons ? this is nature?s way of making sure our bodies get a healthy mix of nutrients and plant chemicals.

Try something new ? try out a new recipe each week and buy a new fruit or vegetable as part of your weekly shopping.

Let colours guide you ? different colours generally indicate different combinations of nutrients. So, put a rainbow of colours (green, white, yellow/orange, blue/purple, red) on your plate.

Preparation and Cooking

Cooking and processing can damage some nutrients and phytochemicals in plant foods. It is important to prepare and cook your fruit and vegetables to retain maximum vitamin and mineral content. Some suggestions to get the best out of your fruit and vegetables include:

Many vegetables and fruits can be eaten raw or pureed into smoothies.

Use a sharp knife to cut fresh fruits to avoid bruising.

Cut off only the ?inedible? parts of vegetables ? sometimes the best nutrients are found in the skin, just below the skin or in the leaves.

Use stir-fry, grill, microwave, bake or steam methods with non-stick cookware and mono-unsaturated oils. Avoid overcooking to reduce nutrient loss.

Serve with pestos, salsas, chutneys and vinegars in place of sour creams, butter and creamy sauces.

Nutrients such as carotenoids may actually be increased if food is cooked. For example, tomato has more carotenoids when cooked.

Once you?ve prepared and cooked your vegetables and fruit, spend some time on presentation. You are more likely to enjoy a meal if it?s full of variety and visually appealing as well as tasty. Sit at the table to eat and enjoy your food without distractions like television.

Things to Remember

Fruits and vegetables contain important vitamins, minerals and ?plant chemicals?. They also contain fibre.

Fruits and vegetables are low in fat, salt and added sugar.

A diet high in fruit and vegetables can help protect against cancer, diabetes and heart disease.