

Fruit and vegetables - choosing and preparing

Fruit and vegetables are an important part of your daily diet. They are tasty and contain vitamins and minerals that can help keep you healthy. Research shows that compounds such as phytochemicals and antioxidants in fruit and vegetables can also help protect against some diseases.

There are many varieties of fruit and vegetables available and they can be prepared, cooked and served in lots of different ways. For good health, try to eat five kinds of vegetable and two kinds of fruit every day.

Select fruit and vegetables for freshness, variety and appeal

To maximise nutrients and appeal, choose to buy and serve different types of fruit and vegetables. Try to buy seasonal fruits and vegetables if possible 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 new recipes and buy new fruit or vegetables as part of your weekly shopping.
- **Let colours guide you** – different colours of fruit and vegetables usually have different combinations of nutrients. So, put a ‘rainbow’ of colours (green, white, yellow–orange, blue–purple, red) on your plate.

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 everyone’s meals and snacks for a healthy well-balanced diet. Some suggestions include:

- Keep snack-size fruit and vegetable 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 add interest to your meals.
- Think up new ways to serve fruits and vegetables.

Some simple ways to serve fruits and vegetables include:

- Fruit and vegetable salads
- Vegetable or meat and 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. It also contains a lot of sugars, even though they may be ‘natural’. Choose water and a serve of fruit.

Preparation and cooking of fruit and vegetables

Cooking and processing can damage some nutrients and phytochemicals in plant foods. Suggestions to get the best out of your fruit and vegetables include:

- Eat raw vegetables and fruits if possible
- Try fruit or vegetables 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 meals with vegetable pestos, salsas, chutneys and vinegars in place of sour creams, butter and creamy sauces.
- Some nutrients such as carotenoids may actually be increased if food is cooked. For example, tomato has more carotenoids, especially lycopene, when it is cooked – a good reason to choose a variety of ways to prepare fruits and vegetables.

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.

Where to get help

- An accredited practising dietitian, contact the Dietitians Association of Australia.
- Nutrition Australia.
- Heart Foundation.
- Your doctor
- Maternal and child health nurse.

Things to remember

- A diet high in fruit and vegetables can help protect against diabetes, heart disease and some cancers.
- There are many varieties of fruit and vegetables available and many ways to prepare, cook and serve them.
- When buying and serving fruit and vegetables, go with variety for maximum nutrients and appeal.
- Cooking and processing can damage some nutrients and phytochemicals in plant foods, while other phytochemicals are more available when food is cooked. Serve a variety of raw and cooked vegetables and fruit.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

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