

# GRAB AND GO LESSON

## Vary Your Vegetables and Fruits

Nutrition and Meal Management |  
Nutrition Needs

**Purpose:** This handout provides the benefits of vegetables and fruits, their nutrients and strategies to vary consumption.

Fruits and vegetables provide many nutrients necessary for a healthy diet. Since all vegetables and fruits contain different nutrients, it's important to vary your intake. They are naturally low in calories, sugars, fat, sodium and cholesterol-free. Many Americans lack nutrients, most of which vegetables and fruits provide, such as potassium, fiber, vitamin C, and folate.

Below are some additional benefits and common sources of nutrients in fruits and vegetables.

### Potassium

Potassium helps to maintain healthy blood pressure, reduce the risk of kidney stones, and decrease bone loss.

- Fruit sources: bananas, prunes, peaches, apricots, cantaloupe, honeydew, and oranges
- Vegetable sources: sweet potatoes, white potatoes, white beans, tomatoes, beet greens, soybeans, lima beans, spinach, lentils, and kidney beans

### Dietary Fiber

Dietary fiber consists of non-digestible carbohydrates, which can improve gastrointestinal health and help people feel fuller longer after a meal. Fiber also reduces blood pressure, constipation, and the risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and obesity. Most fruits and vegetables provide healthy amounts of fiber.

### Vitamin A

Vitamin A keeps your eyes and skin healthy and protects against infections.

- Fruit sources: apricots, cantaloupe, grapefruit, mango, and watermelon
- Vegetable sources: carrots, sweet potato, kale, spinach, broccoli, cabbage, and collard greens

### Vitamin C

Vitamin C is important for body tissue growth and repair. It helps heal cuts and wounds, and keeps the gums and teeth healthy.

- Fruit sources: cantaloupe, citrus fruits, kiwi, mango, papaya, pineapple, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, cranberries, and watermelon
- Vegetable sources: broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, green and red peppers, cabbage, spinach, leafy greens, sweet and white potatoes, tomatoes, and winter squash

### Folate (Folic Acid)

Folate or folic acid is a type of B vitamin. It helps the body grow tissue and improves cell function. Folate deficiency can lead to diarrhea, gray hair, mouth ulcers, and poor growth.

- Fruit sources: citrus fruits and juices
- Vegetable sources: dark leafy greens, beans, and peas

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New research studies suggest that the natural colors of fruits and vegetables help reduce the risk of disease throughout life. For this reason, it is recommended to vary vegetable and fruit consumption. Aim to incorporate different colors into your diet every day.

### Tips for success

- Cook vegetables and fruits in different ways. Children often prefer raw or slightly cooked fruits and vegetables.
- Choose products that are in season.
- Offer fruits and vegetables more often than 100% juices.
- If serving canned vegetables, choose those canned without added salt.
- If serving canned fruits, choose those without added sugar or those in 100% fruit juice.
- Create a fruit salad by combining various fruits.
- Serve a mix of different types of vegetables and fruits.
  - Fruit sources: pears, pumpkin, avocado, apples, raspberries, blackberries, and prunes
  - Vegetable sources: navy beans, white beans, split peas, lentils, chickpeas, pinto beans, and lima beans

### References

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. *2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans [Internet]*. 8th ed. 2015 Dec. <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015>
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