



## Eating Right

### Fruits and vegetables are fantastic choices Why do we ignore them?

Although it's clear that carrots, apples, mangoes, and other fruits and vegetables are good for our health, only about 1 in 10 adults in the United States is eating enough of them.

Fruits and vegetables have undisputed health benefits, as they support weight control, improve digestion, boost our mood, and help prevent chronic disease. So, why do we fall short of eating the recommended daily amount?

It could be because of:

1. **Lack of awareness.** We might not realize just how many servings of fruits of veggies we need each day (2 cups of fruit and 3 of vegetables, according to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found in 2018 that fewer than half of city schools in the U.S. made nutrition education a requirement, so their importance might not be something that we learned about in the classroom.
2. **Lack of time.** Preparing fresh fruits and veggies can be time consuming and messy. Chopping, slicing, and cleaning might not be something we want to deal with after a long day at work. A Tufts University survey found that a quarter of Americans don't cook because they hate cleaning up afterwards.
3. **Taste.** The taste of vegetables might turn people off. Learning how to select, roast, sauté, and flavor fresh vegetables can open up a new world of delicious options, but that could be a non-starter for the 28 percent of Americans that the Tufts University study found don't know how to cook.
4. **High cost and limited access.** Fresh fruits and vegetables are more expensive than prepackaged foods, and fast food is usually the cheapest meal option. In places where fresh foods are scarce — called food deserts — people simply don't have access to fresh produce.

### Overcoming barriers

If these barriers are keeping fruits and vegetables out of your diet, look for:

- **Quick options.** Ready-cut vegetables don't require preparation, and an apple is an easy snack.
- **Something new.** If broccoli isn't your favorite, maybe a spinach salad will do the trick. Also, try roasting vegetables with no-salt seasoning and olive oil to improve the flavor.
- **A low-cost source.** A no-frills grocery store or food pantry might help you fit more fruits and vegetables into your budget. ♦

### 9 ways to get creative with fruits and vegetables

Eating more fruits and vegetables doesn't mean mealtime needs to be dull.

To increase fruit and vegetable consumption and keep mealtime interesting:

1. Blend fruits and vegetables into your smoothies,
2. Experiment with vegetable soups,
3. Get creative with a colorful fruit salad,
4. Add spinach to scrambled eggs,
5. Try veggie noodles,
6. Eat veggie burgers rather than meat burgers,
7. Try veggie or lettuce wraps,
8. Add vegetables to sauces, and
9. Try a variety of frozen vegetable blends that are easily prepared in the microwave. ♦



## Timing it right

### When you eat can help manage weight

People use different strategies to lose and maintain weight, but the time of day you consume your meals may play a role in reaching your goals.

#### Meal timing

Consuming most of your calories earlier in the day can help with weight management and health, according to a study published in *Obesity* in December 2022.

This involves eating a large breakfast, reasonable lunch, and small dinner. This pattern of eating is optimal for digestion because our bodies metabolize food more efficiently during the early part of the day, the study notes.

Timing meals this way may have noticeable effects on:

- Weight,
- Appetite,
- Chronic disease, and
- The body's ability to burn and store fat.

The total number of calories consumed still needs to be considered, as portion control can also impact weight.



#### Time-restricted fasting

Another way to use timing as a weight loss strategy is to limit food intake to a certain window, such as six to eight hours.

This method of weight control is called time-restricted fasting. Research from the National Institute on Aging indicates that it may help:

- Lower blood pressure,
- Control blood sugar levels,
- Reduce inflammation in the body, and
- Promote weight loss.

#### Make it personal

Although studies have shown the positive effects of meal timing and fasting on the body's overall health, it's important to note that what works for one person may not work for another. Consider how the results of these studies can help you support good health. If you have health concerns, talk to your doctor to see if one of these weight management strategies is right for you. ♦

### Try these 10 swaps for healthier eating

An eating plan should include a variety of healthy foods and making small changes can help you stick to healthy habits.

A few swaps can help you manage or reduce the risk for conditions such as diabetes and heart disease, and can also make a difference in your overall health.

Here are 10 ways to improve your diet:

1. Use olive or avocado oil instead of butter.
2. Choose fish instead of beef.
3. Include some fruits and/or vegetables in each meal.
4. Choose meat and dairy products that are lower in saturated fat.
5. Eat one meatless meal per week.
6. Use spaghetti squash or zucchini noodles instead of regular pasta.
7. Include a fiber source with every meal.
8. Use corn tortillas instead of flour tortillas.
9. Drink sparkling water or seltzer in place of soda.
10. For dessert, choose dark chocolate instead of milk chocolate.

Eating for better health doesn't have to be hard. Start slowly by making a few changes at a time. Before you know it, you've formed a habit that will help you become the healthiest you. ♦



#### By the Numbers

**10 percent** of adults eat the recommended 3 cups of vegetables each day.

**12.5 percent** eat the recommended 2 cups of fruit each day.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



**Next Month's Topic:**

**Mental Health**