

Health Benefits of Fruits and Vegetables

Summer is here and the growing season is in full swing. Fruits and vegetables are abundant and available in the stores, from farmers markets, and even our own gardens. Yet, are we consuming enough of them? Results from the 2009 Missouri Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, an annual telephone survey of Missouri adults, show that we are not. Findings show that eighty (80.1) percent of Missouri adults consumed less than five servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Significantly more males (87.6 percent) than females (73.4 percent) consumed less than five servings per day. There were no significant differences in fruit and vegetable consumption among all income levels.

The amount of fruit and vegetable consumed daily depends on your age, sex and level of activity. In general, the USDA recommendation for adults is 1½ to 2 cups of fruit and 2½ to 3 cups of vegetables daily. One serving is approximately ½ cup of most fruits or vegetables.

Some of the health benefits of eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables are listed below.

- Eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables as part of an overall healthy diet may reduce risk for stroke and perhaps other cardiovascular diseases.
- Eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables as part of an overall healthy diet may reduce risk for type 2 diabetes.
- Eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables as part of an overall healthy diet may protect against certain cancers, such as mouth, stomach, and colon-rectum cancer.
- Diets rich in foods containing fiber, such as fruits and vegetables, may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease.
- Eating fruits and vegetables rich in potassium as part of an overall healthy diet may reduce the risk of developing kidney stones and may help to decrease bone loss.
- Eating foods such as vegetables that are low in calories per cup instead of some other higher-calorie food may be useful in helping to lower calorie intake.

Along with the above mentioned benefits, most fruits and vegetables are naturally low in fat and calories. None have cholesterol. They are important sources of many nutrients including potassium, dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin E, and folate.

Tips to help you eat fruits and vegetables

- Buy fresh fruits and vegetables in season. They cost less and are likely to be at their peak flavor.
- Keep a bowl of whole fruit on the table, counter, or in the refrigerator.
- Refrigerate cut-up fruit to store for later.
- Stock up on frozen vegetables for quick and easy cooking in the microwave.
- Buy fruits and vegetables that are easy to prepare. Pick up pre-washed bags of salad greens and add baby carrots or grape tomatoes for a salad in minutes. Buy packages of veggies such as baby carrots or celery sticks or pre-cut packages of fruit (such as melon or pineapple chunks) for quick snacks. Choose packaged fruits that do not have added sugars.
- Use a microwave to quickly “zap” vegetables. White or sweet potatoes can be baked quickly this way.
- Vary your veggie choices to keep meals interesting.
- Try crunchy vegetables, raw or lightly steamed.
- Buy fruits that are dried, frozen, and canned (in water or juice) as well as fresh, so that you always have a supply on hand.

Now is the time to take advantage of farmers markets. Nothing tastes better than fresh locally grown produce. Go to www.mypyramid.gov and click on the 'Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food' link to find a farmers market in your area. More information about the health benefits of fruits and vegetables can be found at www.mypyramid.gov and at www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov.

Be Sure to check out Boonville Farmers Market during National Farmers Market Week, August 1-7, located in the Orschelen Farm and Home parking lot. Their end-of-year festival is scheduled for October 9th.



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