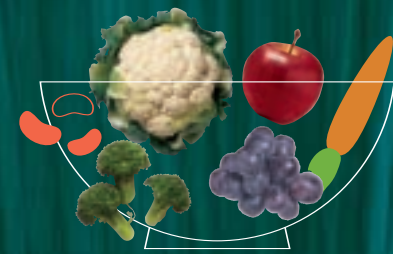




OLDER ADULT

Health Facts



Eat Plenty of Fruits and Vegetables

You’ve probably heard it all your life—fruits, vegetables, and legumes are good for you, and it’s important to eat them every day.

But it helps to know why. Fruits, vegetables, and legumes (dry beans and peas) may *reduce the risk of several chronic diseases*. Compared to people who eat few fruits, vegetables, and legumes, people who eat higher amounts as part of a healthy diet are likely to have reduced risk of chronic diseases, including stroke and perhaps other cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, and cancers in certain parts of the body (mouth, throat, lung, esophagus, stomach, and colon-rectum). A healthy diet is one that:

- Emphasizes a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products
- Includes lean meats, poultry, fish, legumes, eggs, nuts, and seeds
- Balances calorie intake with caloric needs
- Is low in saturated fats, *trans* fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars

When increasing the amount of fruits, vegetables, and legumes you eat, be sure to eat them in place of less nutritious foods, not in addition to them.

The fiber in fruits, vegetables, and legumes is important. Diets rich in fiber-containing foods may reduce the risk of heart disease. Fiber is also important for regularity. Since constipation may be a problem as you get older, it is important to consume foods rich in fiber.

When shopping for fruits and vegetables, choose an assortment of different types and colors to provide a variety of nutrients and other healthful plant substances. Fruits, vegetables, and legumes

that contain vitamins A and C, and potassium, are listed below. All fruits, vegetables, and legumes contain dietary fiber; the table below provides some examples. However, the dietary fiber of fruits and vegetables is reduced by peeling and juicing, so eat the whole fruit and cut up vegetables.

Sources of vitamin A (carotenoids)

- Bright orange vegetables like carrots, sweet potatoes, and pumpkin
- Tomatoes and tomato products (sauce, paste, and puree), and red sweet pepper
- Leafy greens such as spinach, collards, kale, beet and mustard greens, and green leaf lettuce
- Orange fruits like mango, cantaloupe, apricots, and red or pink grapefruit

Sources of vitamin C

- Citrus fruits and juices, kiwi, strawberries, guava, papaya, and cantaloupe
- Broccoli, peppers, tomatoes, cabbage (especially Chinese cabbage), brussels sprouts, and potatoes
- Leafy greens such as romaine lettuce, turnip greens, and spinach

Sources of dietary fiber

- Cooked dry beans
- Raw pears, raspberries, and blackberries
- Dried prunes, figs, and dates
- Cooked green peas, brussels sprouts, and spinach

Sources of potassium

- Baked white or sweet potatoes, cooked greens (such as spinach), and winter (orange) squash
- Bananas, plantains, many dried fruits, oranges and orange juice, cantaloupe, and honeydew melons
- Cooked dry beans and soybeans
- Tomato products
- Beet greens

Eating fruits and vegetables provides other benefits, too. One is calorie control: *many fruits, vegetables, and legumes are low in calories because they are high in water content and fiber.* So, if you're trying to lose weight, fruits, vegetables, and legumes can help you feel full without eating too many calories. Fruits, vegetables, and legumes are packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other nutrients. They can help you get the most nutrition out of the daily number of calories you're supposed to eat. Remember, different vegetables are rich in different nutrients, so aim for a variety of vegetables throughout the week, including those that are dark green and leafy, orange, and starchy. And, don't forget dry beans and peas.

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

Fruits, vegetables, and legumes are packed with nutrients.

The table on page 1 gives examples of fruits, vegetables, and legumes that provide important nutrients such as vitamins A and C, potassium, and dietary fiber. For example, if you eat a 2,000-calorie diet, it is recommended that you eat approximately 4 1/2 cups of fruits and vegetables daily.

One caution about buying packaged (canned, frozen, or dried) fruits and vegetables is they may contain added sugars, saturated fats, or sodium—ingredients you may need to limit. There are three places to look on a package that will give you clues about what is in the food:

- Ingredient list
- Nutrition Facts label
- Front label of the package

This sample product ingredient list for frozen, sweetened strawberries shows you that it contains added sugars.

INGREDIENTS: STRAWBERRIES, INVERT SUGAR SYRUP, CORN SYRUP.

Added sugars can appear on the ingredient list as brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, fruit juice concentrates, glucose, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, invert corn syrup, invert sugar, lactose, maltose, malt syrup, molasses, maple syrup, raw sugar, sucrose, and syrup.

If fruits and vegetables are canned, dried, or frozen, use the Nutrition Facts label to check the calories, nutrient content, and fat, salt (sodium), and sugar. Use the percent Daily Value (% DV) to determine how much dietary fiber, vitamins A and C, and potassium, are in the food you select. Five percent DV or less is low and 20% DV or more is high. Look for foods high in dietary fiber, vitamins A and C, and potassium if you want to meet recommended intakes. Look for foods low in sodium and saturated fat if you want to limit your intake of those nutrients.

In addition, the label on the front of the package may contain claims about the product by the manufacturer. Use the claims on fruit and vegetable packages to identify foods with little salt (sodium) or added sugars. Examples include "low sodium," "no added salt," "no added sugar," and "unsweetened."

Fruit, vegetable, and legume specifics:

- Focus on fruit. Eat a variety of fruits—whether fresh, frozen, canned, or dried—rather than fruit juice for most of your fruit choices.
- Vary your vegetables. Eat more dark green vegetables, such as broccoli, kale, and other dark leafy greens; orange vegetables, such as carrots, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, and winter squash; and dry beans and peas, such as pinto beans, kidney beans, black beans, garbanzo beans, split peas, and lentils.
- If you eat a 2,000-calorie diet, you will need approximately 2 to 2 1/2 cups of fruit and 2 to 2 1/2 cups of vegetables each day and 1/2 cup of beans or peas most days (4 to 5 times a week).

The menu below is an example of how you can incorporate fruits, vegetables, and legumes into a healthy eating plan at 1,600 calories.^a

Menu	
Breakfast	3/4 c oatmeal
	1 medium banana
	1 c fat-free milk
Lunch	Tuna-Grape salad sandwich: 2 oz canned light tuna, packed in water 2 Tbsp celery 3/4 c green or red grapes 1 Tbsp low-fat mayonnaise 2 slices whole-wheat bread 1 large leaf romaine lettuce
	1/2 c steamed broccoli and carrots
	1/2 canned pear, in juice, no added sugar
Dinner	1 1/2 c Chicken and Spanish Rice (see recipe at right)
	1 c cantaloupe
	1 small whole-wheat roll
	1 tsp soft margarine
	1 c fat-free milk
Snack	1/2 c fruit cocktail, in juice, no added sugar
	1 c fruit yogurt, fat-free, no added sugar

Chicken and Spanish Rice (makes 5 servings, serving size: 1 1/2 cups)

1 c onions, chopped	1/2 tsp black pepper
1/4 c green peppers, chopped	1 1/4 tsp garlic, minced
2 tsp vegetable oil	5 c cooked brown rice (in unsalted water)
1 8-oz can tomato puree	3 1/2 c chicken breast, cooked (skin removed), diced
2 1/2 c frozen peas	
1 tsp parsley, chopped	

1. In a large skillet, sauté onions and green peppers in oil for 5 minutes on medium heat.
2. Add tomato puree, peas, and spices. Heat through.
3. Add cooked rice and chicken. Heat through.

Adapted from the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan. Available at: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/index.htm.

^a There is a right number of calories for you to eat each day. This number depends on your age, gender, activity level, and whether you're trying to gain, maintain, or lose weight. To calculate your number, visit www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines and look in the chapters of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005*.

Notes

