

FRUIT AND VEGETABLES



Eat more fruit and vegetables

Why? Because scientists believe that eating more fruit and vegetables helps to protect against heart disease, stroke and some cancers.

We already know that eating a wide variety of fruit and vegetables every day helps to ensure a good intake of vitamins and minerals including vitamin C, folate and potassium as well as other beneficial plant compounds. Not only that but most fruit and vegetables contain little or no fat, are low in calories and also rich in fibre. Increasing the amount of fruit and vegetables you eat is also one way in which you can help prevent weight gain as well as help bring cholesterol levels under control.

Aim to eat at least 5 portions of different fruits and/or vegetables each day

A portion of fruit or vegetables is

- A single fruit, such as an apple or orange
- A cup of small fruit, such as grapes or raspberries
- A glass of fruit juice
- Three heaped tablespoons of cooked vegetables or pulses
- A small bowl of salad

The only exception is potatoes, which are considered a starchy food and therefore don't count towards your five a day.

A source of soluble fibre

High intakes of dietary fibre have been associated with a reduced risk of heart disease as well as some cancers. In particular soluble fibre from oats, pulses and some fruits and vegetables plays a role in helping to reduce cholesterol levels. It is believed to form a gel within the intestines which reduces the re-absorption of bile acids

and therefore prevents the recycling of cholesterol. Legumes such as beans, peas and lentils are rich in soluble fibre as are, broccoli, sweet potatoes, aubergenes, apples, strawberries and prunes.

Phytochemicals

Plants contain a wide range of active compounds which are known as phytochemicals. They are responsible for many of the characteristics of plants, including the colour and flavour of the fruits and vegetables that they produce.

It is widely believed that the health benefits of fruits and vegetables partly result from the presence of these phytochemicals. To get a good mix of these remember to choose a variety of different coloured fruit and vegetables each day e.g. orange, banana, blueberries, broccoli, tomato, sweetcorn and onion.

Remember:

- Don't overcook them! Try cooking in a little water until just tender. You can also steam them, cook them in the microwave or stir-fry using very little oil
- Frozen, dried or canned fruits and vegetables are just as good for you as fresh and they can be quick to prepare, convenient and economical
- Salads can be crunchy and colourful – try chopped peppers, spring onions, radishes, sweetcorn, raw cauliflower as well as the usual lettuce and tomatoes
- Try buying small amounts at a time and store them in a cool, dark, dry place. Replenish frequently
- Dried fruits, like apricots, dates, sultanas and prunes make good snacks and can be added to lunch boxes

For more information on fruit and vegetables

www.5aday.nhs.uk