

FRUITS & VEGETABLES

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Background Information

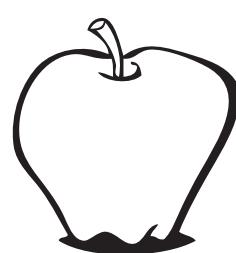
Key Concept: Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables and enjoy them for snacks.

Fruits and vegetables are nutritious and delicious, contributing a wide variety of colors, shapes, flavors, and textures to meals and snacks. They are an excellent source of vitamins, minerals, and fiber—essential nutrients that young bodies need to grow and stay healthy.

In order to give our bodies the nutrients they need, health experts recommend that children and adults eat at least 5-13 servings of fruits and vegetables every day—the more the better. While that may seem like a lot, one serving is only half a cup of vegetables or one small fruit. And, since each fruit and vegetable provides a different “package” of nutrients, it’s important to encourage children to “eat like a rainbow,” that is, eat a wide variety of colorful fruits and vegetables throughout their day. Fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables are most recommended as they are highest in nutrients, but dried and canned fruits and veggies can count as well. 100% fruit and vegetable juices also count. However, in the case of fruit, eating the whole fruit is preferred, as the whole fruit provides fiber along with a greater sense of fullness for fewer calories.

Fruits & Veggies--What are they good for? ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING!

Fruits and vegetables provide essential vitamins and minerals, which help in all of our body's processes. From healing wounds to providing support for optimal growth and development, fruits and vegetables offer protection against chronic disease. Because they are low in calories and high in nutritional value, fruits and vegetables are considered to be nutrient-dense, providing more vitamins and minerals for their calories than any other type of food. Fruits and vegetables also provide complex carbohydrates for energy and are a great way to power up children's meals or snacks. They are also rich in fiber, which helps keep our digestive systems healthy and clean.



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In addition to carbohydrates for energy, here are the major nutrients fruits and vegetables can provide:

- **Vitamin C:** Vitamins A, C, and E are known as “antioxidants” which help prevent cell damage throughout the body. Vitamin C also aids in wound healing, and is needed for the synthesis of collagen, the cementing material that holds body cells together. Vitamin C helps the body resist infection, reduces the severity of colds, strengthens blood vessels, and keeps gums healthy. Studies also have shown that Vitamin C can help protect against certain types of cancers.
- **Vitamin A:** The plant form of this vitamin is known as beta carotene. Beta carotene helps us see in the dark. It also helps keep skin smooth and healthy, protects mucous membranes from infection, and helps maintain a strong immune system to protect against chronic diseases.
- **Vitamin E:** A major antioxidant, Vitamin E protects cells and fats in the body tissues from deteriorating during a wide variety of the body's chemical processes. Vitamin E has also been shown to help protect the lungs from damage caused by air pollution.
- **Calcium:** Calcium is the main structural component of bones and teeth, and is important in all the body's metabolic processes. Kids especially need to consume adequate amounts of calcium in their diet when young, because that is when their bones are being built. The more calcium children get in their early years, the more will be stored in their bones, and the stronger their bones will be as they grow older. When the body isn't getting enough dietary calcium, it will take calcium from the bones, which can cause brittle bones or osteoporosis.
- **Iron:** We need iron to make hemoglobin, which carries oxygen in the blood. This oxygen is brought to other cells where it is used to give the cell power. Iron also assists in the synthesis of neurotransmitters like dopamine and norepinephrine, which aid in sending signals from cell to cell. Without them, there would be no interaction between our neurons and the rest of the cells in the body.
- **Fiber:** Having fiber in the diet helps the body rid itself of wastes, keeps one's intestines clean and bowel function regular. Fiber also provides bulk, helping to make us feel full. A fiber-rich diet is also an important preventative measure against several types of cancer.

