

NATIONAL FRUIT & VEGETABLES MONTH

Eating fruits and vegetables has many health benefits. People who eat fruits and vegetables provide their bodies with essential nutrients that may lower their risk for certain diseases. In the United States, many individuals don't reach their daily recommended servings of fruits and vegetables. Still, increasing your consumption of them is essential to maintain a well-balanced, healthy, and active lifestyle.

As part of Fruit & Vegetable Month, we encourage you to look at the health benefits of fruits and vegetables and challenge you to increase your servings. If you do not look forward to eating fruit or vegetables, start slowly with those you like. Try serving, flavoring, or cooking them in different ways. You can also disguise them in sauces, minced meals, or curries.

Vitamins and minerals in fruit and vegetables

Fruits and vegetables contain many vitamins and minerals that are good for your health. Many of these are antioxidants and may reduce the risk of many diseases:

- Vitamin A (beta-carotene), C & E
- Magnesium
- Zinc
- Phosphorous
- Folic acid

Fruit and vegetables for good health

Fruits and vegetables are low in fat, salt, and sugar. They are a good source of dietary fiber, making you feel fuller for longer and preventing overconsumption of food. As part of a well-balanced, healthy diet and an active lifestyle, a high intake of fruit and vegetables can help you to:

- Reduce obesity and maintain a healthy weight
- Lower your cholesterol
- Lower your blood pressure.

Fruit and vegetables and protection against diseases

Vegetables and fruit contain antioxidants and phytochemicals or plant chemicals. These biologically active substances can help to protect you from some diseases. Scientific research shows that if you regularly eat lots of fruit and vegetables, you have a lower risk of:

- Type 2 diabetes
- Stroke
- Heart (Cardiovascular) Disease
- Cancer – Some forms of cancer, especially bowel, stomach and throat cancers later in life
- High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)

Subgroups of Vegetables & Fruits

Now that you know the health benefits of fruits and vegetables, we advise you to challenge yourself to consume more servings of fruits and vegetables daily and encourage you to eat different subgroups of fruits and vegetables. Subgroups are known as the categories that fall under each food group.

Vegetables are categorized into five subgroups: Dark-Green Vegetables, Red & Orange Vegetables, Beans, Peas & Legumes, Starchy Vegetables, and Other Vegetables. See page 2 for the vegetable subgroup chart.

By including various vegetables from different subgroups, you are ensuring your body consumes different vitamins and antioxidants and allows variety in your diet. Vegetables can be cooked or prepared in many ways, whether eating fresh or canned vegetables or cooking them on the stove-top or grill. Vegetables also allow you many options to flavor them with seasonings that cater to your food palate.

Unlike vegetables, fruits have no subgroups. Fruits are the sweet, fleshy, edible part of a plant and are usually eaten raw, although some varieties can be cooked. They come in a wide variety of colors, shapes, and flavors. As stated, fruits don't have particular subgroups, but there are a few categories that a variety of fruits fall into:

- Apples and pears
- Citrus – oranges, grapefruits, mandarins, and limes
- Stone fruit – nectarines, apricots, peaches, and plums
- Tropical and exotic – bananas and mangoes
- Berries – strawberries, raspberries, blueberries & kiwi
- Melons – watermelons and honeydew melons
- Tomatoes and avocados.



NATIONAL FRUIT & VEGETABLES MONTH

| Dark Green Fresh, frozen, and canned | Red/Orange Fresh, frozen, and canned | Beans and Peas (Legumes)* Cooked from dry, canned, or frozen |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Arugula ■ Beet greens ■ Bok choy ■ Broccoli ■ Broccoli rabe (rapini) ■ Broccolini ■ Butterhead lettuce (Boston, Bibb) ■ Chicory ■ Cilantro ■ Collard greens ■ Endive ■ Escarole | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fiddle heads ■ Grape leaves ■ Kale ■ Mesclun ■ Mustard greens ■ Parsley ■ Spinach ■ Swiss chard ■ Red leaf lettuce ■ Romaine lettuce ■ Turnip greens ■ Watercress | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Acorn squash ■ Butternut squash ■ Carrots (orange only) ■ Cherry peppers ■ Hubbard squash ■ Orange peppers ■ Pimientos ■ Pumpkin ■ Red chili peppers ■ Red peppers ■ Salsa (100% vegetables) ■ Spaghetti squash ■ Sweet potatoes ■ Tomatoes ■ Tomato juice ■ Winter squash ■ Yams |
| Starchy Fresh, frozen, and canned | Other Fresh, frozen, and canned | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Black-eyed peas, fresh (not dry) ■ Corn ■ Cassava ■ Cowpeas, fresh (not dry) ■ Field peas, fresh (not dry) ■ Green bananas ■ Green peas ■ Hominy, whole (canned, drained) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Jicama ■ Lima beans, green (not dry) ■ Parsnips ■ Pigeon peas, fresh (not dry) ■ Plantains ■ Potatoes ■ Poi ■ Taro ■ Water chestnuts ■ Yautia (tannier) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Artichokes ■ Asparagus ■ Avocado ■ Bamboo shoots ■ Bean sprouts, cooked only (for food safety), e.g., alfalfa, mung ■ Beans, green and yellow ■ Beets ■ Breadfruit ■ Brussels sprouts ■ Cabbage (green, red, celery, Napa) ■ Cactus (nopales) ■ Cauliflower ■ Carrots, rainbow (e.g., pink, purple, red, white, and yellow) ■ Celery ■ Chayote (mirliton) ■ Cucumbers ■ Chives ■ Daikon (oriental radish) ■ Eggplant ■ Fennel ■ Garlic ■ Green chili peppers ■ Green onions (scallions) ■ Green peppers ■ Horseradish ■ Iceberg lettuce ■ Kohlrabi ■ Leeks ■ Mushrooms ■ Okra ■ Olives ■ Onions (white, yellow, red) ■ Peas in pod, e.g., snap peas, snow peas ■ Pepperoncini ■ Pickles (cucumber) ■ Purple peppers ■ Radishes ■ Rhubarb ■ Rutabagas ■ Shallots ■ Sauerkraut ■ Seaweed |

Chart containing the five vegetable subgroups and the names of vegetables that fall under each category (USDA)

Selecting fruits and vegetables

To maximize nutrients and appeal, buy and serve different types of fruit and vegetables. Try to buy fruits and vegetables in season, and choose for freshness and quality. You should:

- Eat with the seasons – this is nature's way of ensuring our bodies get a healthy mix of nutrients and plant chemicals.
- Try something new – try new recipes and buy fresh fruit or vegetables as part of your weekly shopping.
- Let colors guide you – get different combinations of nutrients by putting a 'rainbow' of colors (green, white, yellow-orange, blue-purple, red) on your plate.

Conclusion

Now that you know more about the benefits of incorporating fruits and vegetables into your diet, we encourage you to take the steps for you and your family to balance out the foods you consume. Again, if you are someone who does not look forward to eating fruit or vegetables, start to slowly incorporate them instead of diving in head first. Many grocery stores allow you to buy single items, so you can try a variety without committing to a bundle or bag. When you find fruits or vegetables you like, you can also try serving, flavoring, or cooking them differently. For the more adventurous type, you can also disguise them in sauces, minced meals, or curries. The possibilities are endless as we celebrate Fruit & Vegetable Month this September.

View our Monthly Nutrition Notes that offers free monthly tips for healthy eating & staying active by visiting www.TomahHealth.org!

Work Cited:

USDA. "Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020 -2025 Make Every Bite Count with the Dietary Guidelines." USDA, Dec. 2020.