



A Simple guide to:

## **FRUIT & VEG**

We have all been told over and over again we should be eating fruit and vegetables every day – be that 3 portion, 5 portions, 8 portions. But why? And in what proportion? What is it about these food items that does us good?

Fruit and vegetables are rich in vitamins and minerals which keep the body healthy. They also contain chemicals called antioxidants, such as beta carotene and vitamin C. These are thought to protect against damaging chemicals that get into the body. However, the exact way in which they prevent disease is not fully understood.

Fruit and vegetables also contain fibre. This can help to control cholesterol levels and keep blood sugar levels steady. Eating fruit and vegetables can help to replace other foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar, which further helps to reduce our risk of these diet-related diseases.

Having a low intake of fruit and vegetables is estimated to cause about 19% of cancers of the digestive system, 31% of heart disease and 11% of stroke.

### **How many portions a day?**

Until recently, when the newspapers seem to suggest it should be adjusted to three portions a day, health promotion campaigns often referred to **'five a day'**. Why are we encouraged to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables each day? The World Health Organization collected evidence together in 1990. It was found that a minimum of 400 g (about five 80 g portions) were needed to:

- Allow us to meet our nutritional requirements.
- Protect us from diseases such as stroke, heart disease, some cancers, type 2 diabetes and obesity.

In fact, five portions of fruit and vegetables each day was the minimum (and HMHB believes that although we are promoting choice and options to our service users, this recommendation should be listened to). This number is also based on how many portions the nation is likely to be able to achieve. So, if it is set too high, the target would be unrealistic. Nevertheless, it appears that the more fruit and vegetables we eat, the greater our protection from diet-related diseases. Other countries promote less or more portions – but you definitely need some. Currently only about a third of the UK adults meet the 'five-a-day' recommendation, and only about one in ten people aged 11-18 years.

**Vegetables seem to be more beneficial to health than fruit.** The Australian government's recommendation is for two plus five: two portions of fruit and five portions of vegetables each day. People in France are encouraged to eat ten portions of fruit and vegetables daily. In Japan the recommendation is for 13 portions of vegetables and four portions of fruit.

It is therefore recognised that more vegetables than fruit should be eaten daily.



### **What are the best fruits to eat?**

According to several health sites these are:

#### **Grapefruit**

Grapefruit is highly nutritious. Eating it may reduce insulin resistance, cholesterol and help prevent kidney stones. Grapefruit may also be useful for weight loss

#### **Pineapple**

Pineapple is rich in vitamin C and manganese. Its bromelain content may fight inflammation and reduce the risk of cancer

#### **Avocado**

Avocados are rich in healthy fats and potassium, both of which are well known for their role in promoting heart health

#### **Blueberries**

Blueberries are rich in a few important nutrients. They have a high antioxidant capacity and immune-enhancing properties, which may protect the body from illness

#### **Apples**

Apples are very nutritious. Their nutrients, antioxidants and fibre may reduce the risk of disease and improve digestion

#### **Pomegranates**

Pomegranates have wide-ranging health benefits. They are incredibly high in antioxidants and other plant compounds that can help reduce inflammation and prevent disease

#### **Mangoes**

Mangoes contain vitamin C and soluble fibre. They also contain plant compounds with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects

### **Strawberries**

Strawberries are rich in several nutrients and antioxidants. Eating them may help control your blood sugar levels and reduce your risk of some diseases

### **Cranberries**

Cranberries are rich in several nutrients and antioxidants. They also contain beneficial plant compounds that help prevent urinary tract infection

### **Lemons**

Lemons are rich in vitamin C and other plant compounds that may promote heart health, boost weight loss and help prevent kidney stones

### **Watermelon**

Watermelon is high in water, nutrients and antioxidants. It is also particularly high in a powerful antioxidant called lycopene

### **Olives**

Olives provide a variety of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. These may reduce the risk of heart disease, cancer and osteoporosis

### **Blackberries**

Blackberries are a good source of many nutrients and beneficial plant compounds. Their antioxidants and anti-inflammatory properties may lower the risk of chronic disease

### **Oranges**

Oranges contain some important vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. These may reduce the risk of several conditions such as kidney stones and anaemia

### **Bananas**

Bananas provide several nutrients and plant compounds, including resistant starch and pectin. Bananas can have benefits for exercise, blood sugar control and digestive health (runners are encouraged to eat a banana before a race as it can prevent cramp)

## **What are the best Vegetables to eat?**



### **Tomatoes**

Though technically a fruit, tomatoes are most often served like a vegetable. Full of lycopene, these beautiful red orbs (and all tomato-based products) are renowned for their cancer-fighting capabilities. Not only are they chock-full of vitamin-y goodness (from vitamins A to K), but they also keep our blood pressure in check and help to reduce the number of free radicals in our bodies

### **Broccoli**

Few foods measure up to the disease-fighting potential of broccoli. This cruciferous veg is packed with antioxidants that help reduce the risk of stomach, lung and rectal cancers. And because broccoli is rich in beta carotene, vitamin C and folate, it is also good at boosting your immunity to colds and flus

### **Brussel Sprouts**

Although they are mostly associated with Christmas, these little green veggies are especially important for pregnant woman because they're packed with folic acid, a B vitamin that prevents neural tube defects. Brussels sprouts are also packed with vitamins C and K as well as fibre, potassium and omega-3 fatty acid

### **Carrots**

These orange wonders are loaded with eye-, skin- and hair-enriching nutrients. They're also the richest vegetable source of some important antioxidants, like vitamin A. And because they're rich in vitamin C, carrots protect your cardiovascular system from damage (although the stories about them helping you see in the dark are not so true – it was a story put about in the war to mislead the enemy about our pilots)

### **Squash**

A good source of anti-inflammatory nutrients like vitamin C and beta carotene, squash, especially summer squash, can help treat dozens of conditions, including asthma, osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. Squash is also rich in potassium, magnesium and fibre

### **Sweet Potato**

Not to be confused with the normal potato, this root vegetable has dozens of anti-cancer nutrients, like vitamin A, C and manganese. They're also a good source of fibre and iron, so not only do they give you energy, but they can also help regulate your digestive system

### **Aubergine/Eggplant**

High in heart-healthy nutrients, eggplants are rich in antioxidants like nasunin (a unique compound that protects your brain cells from damage). And because eggplants are loaded with fibre and potassium, researchers believe they may reduce your risk of stroke and dementia

### **Bell Peppers**

Whether you prefer red, orange or yellow, bell peppers are packed with dozens of heart-healthy nutrients like lycopene and folic acid. And recent research suggests digging into a pepper every day may lower your risk of developing lung, colon, bladder and pancreatic cancers

### **Spinach**

This chlorophyll-packed type of produce is an excellent source of almost every vitamin and nutrient you need. Scientists believe a diet heavy in spinach may be able to prevent everything from heart disease to colon cancer and arthritis to osteoporosis

### **Onions**

These pungent-smelling veggies are particularly good for people suffering from (or at risk of developing) osteoporosis. That's because onions are loaded with a peptide called GPCS, which scientists believe slows your body's loss of calcium. Onions may also be useful in the fight against heart disease and diabetes because they're loaded with vitamin C and folate

## What does not count?

- Potatoes, yams, cassava and plantain: these contain more starch than anything else, so they don't count as a portion.
- Fruitcake/fruit yoghurts: these contain little fruit and also have added sugar, fat and other ingredients. So we should be trying to keep these to a minimum in the diet.
- Fruit-flavoured soft drinks: these usually contain minimal fruit and are high in sugar.
- Tomato ketchup, jam and chutneys: these have high salt/sugar content

## Will this cost a lot of money?

One of the biggest replies when we have mentioned to people about eating healthily is that “it costs more” or “is expensive” compared to other foods. We all understand that a lot of us are on tight budgets, but you can eat more fruit and veg:

- Make use of markets. You can often get cheap deals and bargains.
- Look out for offers in supermarkets such as 'buy one, get one free'.
- Choose loose fruit and vegetables - check the price labels and compare how much they are per kilogram (kg).
- Look out for the reduced section in supermarkets. Sometimes you'll find price cuts on fruit and vegetables that are on the shelves for their last day.
- Go later in the evening to local stalls and get a bargain on fruit and vegetables that may otherwise go to waste
- Buy in season, as this is when fruit and vegetables tend to be cheaper.
- Frozen or dried fruit and vegetables can be cheaper and you don't need to worry about them going off too quickly.
- Tinned fruit and vegetables such as tinned tomatoes, beans, pulses, carrots, sweetcorn and peas are cheap. They can be added to casseroles, stews, soups, bolognese, curries, stir-fries or pasta dishes. Try to avoid those with added salt or sugar.
- Vegetables that are soon to go out of date can be used to make soups. These can then be frozen and eaten later.
- Vegetables are usually cheaper than meat. So, by adding more vegetables to meat dishes, you can make them go further.
- Many fruits and vegetables are easy to grow yourself, even if you don't have a big garden. There are some which can be grown on a kitchen windowsill

