

Fruit and vegetables – how to get five-a-day

There are many health benefits of eating more fruits and vegetables. Getting your '5-a-day' is a good idea for everyone. Fruits and vegetables are such great additions to your diet. This Food Fact Sheet will give you tasty examples of how to get your 5-a-day.

Why are fruits and vegetables so beneficial?

As well as tasting great, fruits and vegetables are incredibly versatile, packed with essential vitamins and minerals, a variety of phytochemicals (naturally occurring plant substances) and fibre that are vital for good health.

Many of these nutrients also act as powerful antioxidants, protecting the body from harmful free radicals (found in pollutants) that can cause disease.

People who eat plenty of fruit and veg have a lower risk of developing many diseases, including high blood pressure, obesity, heart disease, stroke and some cancers.

It is estimated diet is likely to contribute to the development of 1/3 of all cancers, and eating a healthy, balanced diet, with more fruits and vegetables is the second most important cancer prevention strategy, after stopping smoking.

There is evidence to show for every portion of fruit and vegetables eaten there is greater protection against heart disease and strokes (by up to 30%) and some cancers (by up to 20%).

How much is a portion?

One portion is 80g or any of the following:

- one banana, orange, pear or apple or a similar sized fruit
- half a grapefruit or avocado
- a slice of large fruit such as melon or pineapple
- two satsumas, plums or similar sized fruit
- a handful of grapes (about 10-12)
- two handfuls of blueberries or raspberries (about 15-20)
- one heaped tablespoon of dried fruit, such as sultanas, currants or cranberries, or three heaped tablespoons of fruit salad (fresh/tinned in fruit juice)
- three heaped tablespoons of vegetables (raw, cooked, frozen or tinned)

■ three heaped tablespoons of any 'pulse' – beans, peas or lentils (however much you eat, pulses only count as one of your five a-day)

■ one cereal bowl of lettuce, watercress or spinach or mixed leaves

Other health benefits include a delay in the development of cataracts (cloudy lens of the eye) and age-related macular degeneration (a common condition that affects the middle part of your vision), reducing the symptoms of asthma, improving digestive health, better management of diabetes and improved bone health.

Fruits and vegetables also have the added bonus that they are naturally low in energy (calories) and high in fibre, helping you to maintain a healthier weight.

How much should you eat?

The World Health Organization and the Department of Health recommend that you should aim to eat at least five portions of a wide variety of fruit and vegetables a day – just over a third of the food we eat each day.

Children should also be encouraged to eat at least five different portions a day as they will likely continue to eat them as teenagers and adults.

What else counts as one of your five a day?

Fresh, frozen, dried and canned fruit and vegetables all count. Also, pulses can count for one of your five-a-day.

Potatoes, yams, plantain, and cassava do not contribute towards your five-a-day because they are starchy foods, although they still form part of a balanced diet. Sweet potatoes, parsnips and butternut squash do count!

Fruit/veg juices and smoothies

A glass (150ml) of unsweetened 100% fresh or pure fruit and vegetable juice counts as one portion. However, no



matter how much you drink (for example more than 150ml), it will still only count as one of your portions per day because the juicing process removes most of the fibre from the fruit.

Crushing fruit into juice releases the sugars contained in the fruit. To reduce the impact on teeth, enjoy a small glass at mealtimes and wait 30 minutes to brush your teeth after drinking juice or smoothies, as the juice softens the enamel and can cause teeth to erode.

Five-a-day the easy way!

Eat one or two portions with each meal and make fruit or vegetables the first choice for a snack and it will make it easier to eat at least 5-a-day.

Sample day:

Breakfast

A bowl of wholegrain breakfast cereal with a sliced banana and a glass of fruit juice

Mid-morning snack

A handful of your favourite raw vegetables – cherry tomatoes, button mushrooms, carrot, celery, pepper sticks

Lunch

Add a side salad, to your lunchtime sandwich and a small pack of dried raisins or piece of fruit

Mid-afternoon snack

Opt for fresh melon or mango slices

Dinner

Indulge in a spicy chilli or hearty winter casserole packed full of seasonal vegetables and serve with another portion of vegetables on the side

What about supplements?

You shouldn't rely on supplements to get the vitamins and minerals your body needs, unless you have been told to by a health professional. Supplements are not a substitute for a healthy diet and lifestyle.

A well-balanced diet containing plenty of fruits and vegetables is cheaper and more nutritious than taking supplements. For more information, talk to your GP or dietitian.

Top tips to get your five-a-day

- 🔹 **Go for those in season:** They are more likely to be locally grown, cheaper and often look and taste the best
- 🔹 **Eat a rainbow:** Variety is important. Different coloured fruits and vegetables contain their own combination of vitamins, minerals and fibre
- 🔹 **Cut down or avoid butter, cream or cheese sauces:** Fruits and vegetables are low in calories, but their calorie content is determined by what you eat them with
- 🔹 **Be careful not to eat too many dried fruits:** A 30g portion of dried fruits, like apricots, dates or raisins counts towards your 5-a-day. However, once fruit is dried it also becomes a concentrated source of sugar and calories
- 🔹 **Check nutrition information on labels and look out for the '5-a-day' logo:** Vegetables contained in convenience foods such as ready meals can contribute to your five-a-day. Many of these foods may be high in added salt, sugar or fat. Aim to serve these with an additional portion of vegetables, which can be frozen for convenience
- 🔹 **Cut down on your meat portion sizes:** Bulk up on or replace meat with vegetables and pulses by adding them to stews, curries and casseroles
- 🔹 **Treat your fruit and veggies right:** Nutrients in fruit and vegetables can be easily destroyed by heat, so try steaming, microwaving, roasting or poaching rather than boiling
- 🔹 **Keep your freezer and cupboards well stocked:** Keep a supply of frozen and/or canned vegetables and fruits (in juice rather than syrup) at home. They stay fresher for longer and they all count towards your five-a-day

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If you need to see a dietitian, visit your GP for a referral or bda.uk.com/find-a-dietitian for a private dietitian. You can check your dietitian is registered at hcpc-uk.org.

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