

## **The importance of fruits and vegetables**

### **Why are they so important?**

Fruits and vegetables are one of the most important components of our diets. They are a rich source of vitamins, minerals and fibre needed for overall good health.

Different fruit and vegetables contain:

- Vitamin C - important for maintaining healthy body tissues.
- Vitamin A - important for maintenance of the eyes, skin and the immune system.
- Folate - important for normal and healthy blood formation.
- Fibre – helps to maintain a healthy gut.
- Magnesium – necessary for healthy bones
- Iron – helps to transport oxygen throughout the body.
- Potassium – helps to maintain a healthy blood pressure and important for the normal functioning of the nervous system.

### **How much should we eat?**

Recommendations in the UK state we should aim to eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day. This developed from a recommendation from the World Health Organisation (WHO) that consuming 400g of fruit and vegetables per day can reduce risks of serious health problems, such as heart disease, stroke and some types of cancer. WHO's role is to promote health and combat disease by developing guidelines based on scientific studies.

In 2018, 28% of adults ate the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables per day. Even more worrying is that only 18% of children aged 5 to 15 ate five standard portions. This was 17% for boys and 19% for girls.

### **What counts as a portion?**

A portion of fruit or vegetables is 80g. This is around:

- 1 medium sized piece of fruit, such as an apple, banana, pear, orange or nectarine
- 2 or more small fruits such as plums, satsumas, kiwi fruit or apricots
- Half a large fruit, such as grapefruit or avocado
- A large handful of berries, cherries or grapes
- 1 dessert bowl of salad
- 2 broccoli spears
- 3 heaped tablespoons of peas, carrots or sweetcorn
- 4 heaped tablespoons of cooked cabbage, spinach or curly kale

















 1 medium apple	 7 strawberries	 1 dessert bowl of salad	 3 tablespoons of sweetcorn
 1/2 of a grapefruit	 2 broccoli spears	 3 tablespoons of carrots	 1 medium orange
 1 medium banana	 4 heaped tablespoons of cooked spinach	 3 tablespoons of peas	 1 medium pear
 1/2 an avocado	 2 kiwi fruit	 2 satsumas	 7 cherry tomatoes

Photo sourced from: [www.nutrition.org.uk](http://www.nutrition.org.uk)

## Other sources

Dried fruit:

- One portion of dried fruit such as raisins, cranberries or sultanas, is 30g (one heaped tablespoon) based on the weight of the fresh fruit.
- Dried fruit can stick to teeth, which can lead to tooth decay, so try to keep dried fruit to mealtimes and as snacks in-between.

Juices and Smoothies:

- 150ml glass of unsweetened 100% fruit or vegetable juice or smoothie
- When fruit is juiced or blended, sugars are released which can cause damage to teeth as well as tending to spike blood-glucose levels up and down which can cause lethargy and hunger, so try to have no more than 150ml per day.
- No matter how much you drink, only one 150ml portion will count as one of your 5 a day.

Beans and pulses:

- One portion of pulses such as beans, peas or lentils, is 80g (three heaped tablespoons).
- No matter how much you eat, pulses will only count as one of your 5 a day.

## Ways to increase intake

Simply ways to help increase a child's fruit and vegetable intake is by making easy swaps or additions to their mealtimes and snacks. For example:

- Adding fruit to their breakfast cereal, or mash banana into their porridge
- Adding a side salad to their lunch
- Adding vegetables to soups, sauces and pasta dishes
- Replace snacks with a piece of fruit or vegetable sticks
- Have fruit and yogurt for a refreshing dessert

A good way to ensure they get their 5 a day is to have 1 portion with breakfast, 2 with lunch and 2 with dinner. You can add even more by offering fruit or vegetables as snacks.

## **Eat the rainbow**

Another important thing to remember is... Variety!

Different types of fruits and vegetables contain different combinations of important nutrients, and are therefore associated with different benefits to cardiometabolic risk factors. So, to get the most nutritional benefit out of your 5 a day, try to “eat the rainbow” by including a wide variety of fruits and vegetables from each of the colour groups.

- **Red Foods and Inflammation.** (Tomatoes, strawberries, beets). High in antioxidants with anti-inflammatory properties and nutrients important in immune system modulation such as vitamin C.
- **Orange Foods and Reproductive Health.** (Carrots, yam, and orange fruits - mandarins, oranges, and tangerines). Rich in carotenoids (a type of antioxidant) which are important in regulating the hormone endocrine and plays a role in fertility by supporting ovulation.
- **Yellow Foods and Digestion.** (Lemons, pineapple, bananas). Rich in fibre to support a healthy gut by keeping the digestive tract flowing and maintain bowel movements.
- **Green Foods and Cardiovascular Health.** (Leafy and cruciferous vegetables). High in a variety of nutrients for cardiovascular health, such as vitamin K, folate, magnesium and potassium.
- **Blue-Purple Foods and Cognition** (Blueberries). Rich in polyphenol (a micronutrient) which supports learning, memory, and mood.