

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES—ARE YOU EATING ENOUGH?

February is Heart Month and eating a healthy diet plays an important role in preventing heart disease. If I had to recommend just one thing people could do to eat healthier it would be to eat more vegetables and fruit. Research clearly connects vegetable and fruit consumption to health and longevity.

Most Canadians still fall short of the Canada Food Guide recommendation for adults to eat seven to ten servings a day. Here in B.C., only around 40 per cent of us (age 12 and over) get five servings or more of vegetables and fruit a day so we clearly have some work to do.

How many servings of vegetables and fruit did you eat yesterday? Before you count, consider how big a serving size actually is. One serving of vegetables is half a cup chopped (fresh, frozen or canned) or one cup of raw leafy greens. One serving of fruit is half a cup chopped (fresh, frozen, or canned) or a whole medium sized fruit. A half cup of 100 per cent fruit or vegetable juice also counts as a serving but it is better to eat whole fruits and vegetables than to drink juice because fruit juices are a concentrated source of sugar and store bought vegetable juices are usually high in salt.

Seven to ten servings of vegetables and fruit may sound like a lot. If you are not accustomed to it, the volume can seem daunting. Many vegetables are very low in calories so you do get a lot of nutrients, fibre, and disease fighting phytochemicals in very few calories. For example, a cup of spinach has just seven calories and provides fiber as well as vitamins and minerals like vitamin K, vitamin A, folate, magnesium, potassium, and iron that support good health.

With year round availability and many convenient options, it's never been easier to eat lots of vegetables and fruit. Here are some tips to help you get seven to ten servings a day.

- Aim for half a plate of vegetables at lunch and supper.
- Buy berries when in season. Freeze for easy nutritious desserts or for adding to smoothies or home baking.
- After you shop, pre-pack baggies of chopped vegetables to bring to work or to send to school.
- Keep frozen vegetables on hand for a quick and easy side dish.
- Buy kale or spinach in season or on sale. Wash it, cut it and put it in the freezer to add to smoothies, soups, and sauces.
- When you make a salad, prepare enough greens and cut up vegetables to have a salad another day.

Don't let fruits and vegetables go to waste. Learning how to properly store fruits and vegetables can save you time and money. For information on storing vegetables and fruit check out our website - <http://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourHealth/HealthyLiving/FoodSecurity/Documents/Store%20it.pdf>

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