

Superfoods: Fruits & Vegetables

Developed by: Angela Rathert e-mail: arathert@purdue.edu

HHS & 4-H Youth Educator in Jefferson County

Lesson Goal: Participants will identify why fruits and vegetables are so important to include in a healthy diet. Participants will increase the amount of fruits and vegetables they eat each day.

When you think of the word Superfood, give some examples of what you immediately think of. Steven Platt, MD, best-selling author, ocular surgeon, and healthcare, nutrition and lifestyle specialist coined the buzzword in his groundbreaking 2004 book, *SuperFoods Rx: Fourteen Foods That Will Change Your Life*. Dr. Pratt stated that he had uncovered the key nutrient-rich foods that play a significant role in achieving **optimal health**. Since then it seems there is a new “Superfood” mentioned every time we turn on the TV, cruise the internet or Facebook. Constantly chasing the newest superfood can actually cause stress as well as time and money, only to find the “so called superfood” may not be that helpful after all.

Of course, we pursue these magic foods so that we can live a long and healthy life, even though, deep down we probably know that a superfood is too good to be true. **The best way to achieve optimal health is to eat an overall healthy diet.** Everything you eat and drink matters. The key is choosing a variety of foods and beverages from each food group that are low in saturated fats, sodium and added sugars. Still, if you are looking to make a positive change in your diet that can make a big difference, consider Fruits and Vegetables.

According to the USDA’s and MyPlate, there are five food day in varying amounts. Of those vegetables occupy one-half of our



Nutritional Guidelines groups needed every food groups, fruits and plate at mealtime.

If you gauge a food’s importance, with eat each day, then fruits and

the amount we should vegetables could be

considered the real superfoods! **Fruits and Vegetables are nutrient dense; full of vitamins, minerals, and fiber.** In addition, they are low in calories and sodium. A diet rich in fruits and vegetables are even helpful in reducing the risk for heart disease, protect against certain types of cancers, and help lower caloric intake. In fact, one study in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* concluded, “reducing dietary energy density, particularly by combining increased fruit and vegetable intakes with decreased fat intake, is an effective strategy for managing body weight while controlling hunger.”

Fruits provide nutrients such as potassium, dietary fiber, Vitamin C and folate. When eating fruit, focus on whole fruits; they can be fresh, canned (in water), frozen, or dried. Whole fruits have more fiber. When drinking juice, choose 100% juice. The sugar naturally found in fruit does not count as added sugars.

Vegetables provide vitamins and minerals and most are low in calories providing you do not load them up with added fats, and sugars. Vitamins and

minerals are essential for your body to grow and work the way it should. Vitamins have different jobs in the body, some help your body resist infection, others keep your nerves healthy and one helps clot your blood. Minerals help with other functions of the body. Some minerals such as iodine and fluoride are needed in small amounts while others such as calcium, magnesium, and potassium are needed in larger quantities. Vegetables are divided into sub groups based on their nutrient content; dark leafy greens, red and orange, beans and peas, starchy and other. Different groups provide different vitamins and minerals thus it is important to provide a variety of different colored vegetables at mealtime and throughout the week. The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that we eat more red and orange and dark green vegetables. Check the table identifying how many servings of each sub group you need each week.

Beans are in two food groups, protein or vegetable. If you choose beans for their dietary fiber, folate and potassium, count them as a vegetable, but if you are counting on them for protein, iron and zinc, count them as a protein food. The peas grouped with beans are black eyed, split or chickpeas (garbanzo beans).

In addition to making sure our plate is half full of fruits and vegetables, it is important to note that we need **2 cups (or 4 servings) of fruits and 2 ½ cups (or 5 servings) of vegetables a day**. One serving would equal ½ cup. Handouts are included in this lesson to suggest different ways of including fruits and vegetables in your diet.

Andrew Dole, RDN and *Everyday Chef* & Performance Nutrition Expert with Fruits & Veggies—More Matters, explains how eating more Fruits and Vegetables help us shed pounds. As he points out, most of us wanting to lose weight think we have to restrict our calories and eat less. Eating more fruits and vegetables, which are nutrient dense and lower in calories, can provide the nutrition we need and help us to feel full. He shares a few tips:

1. **Snacks.** When feeling snacky go for some cut melon like cantaloupe or honeydew.
2. **Appetizers.** Forget the chips and pretzels. Enjoy hummus and yogurt dips with baby carrots, celery, or chopped peppers.
3. **Pre/Post Workout.** Need a before or after workout snack? Avoid energy bars and 'carbed up' sports products. Add some fruit like bananas, grapes, peaches, and berries to Greek yogurt or cottage cheese.
4. **Fill Up!** Looking for a hearty, fill you up feeling at meal times; roasted broccoli, cauliflower and eggplant work nicely.
5. **Instead of Sweets.** Insatiable mid-day sweet tooth cravings can be cancelled out with pickled vegetable snacks like spicy pickled carrots, garlic mushrooms, or cider okra. The classic dill pickle is always an option too.

When you prepare your fruits and vegetables, just keep in mind to prepare them in ways that make them nutritious and delicious without adding calories with sauces, gravies, cream and/or butter. Try steaming, roasting or stir frying vegetables or using them raw with yogurt dips or hummus. Eat fruits whole or sweeten up your dishes with fruits instead of added sugars. Add to your list of fruits and vegetables by trying new ones to increase variety and nutrition. A few sample recipes are included in the handouts for you to get started.

By providing a variety of types and colors of fruits and vegetables, one should have no problem getting all of the nutrients they need for optimal health. In fact, by eating a varied diet following the MyPlate dietary guidelines would ensure that a person got all of the necessary nutrition without taking supplements. The only time someone would have to take supplements is when they are not making the best food choices or when prescribed by a doctor.

Fruits and Vegetables, nutrient dense, high in fiber and water, low in calories and salt, are as close to the idea of real superfoods as one can get. The key is to vary your choices to make sure you get all the nutrients they provide for what we all want, optimal health.

Sources

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WEEKLY VEGETABLE SUBGROUP TABLE

		AMOUNT PER WEEK				
		DARK GREEN VEGETABLES	RED AND ORANGE VEGETABLES	BEANS AND PEAS	STARCHY VEGETABLES	OTHER VEGETABLES
CHILDREN	2-3 yrs old	½ cup	2 ½ cups	½ cup	2 cups	1 ½ cups
	4-8 yrs old	1 cup	3 cups	½ cup	3 ½ cups	2 ½ cups
GIRLS	9-13 yrs old	1 ½ cups	4 cups	1 cup	4 cups	3 ½ cups
	14-18 yrs old	1 ½ cups	5 ½ cups	1 ½ cups	5 cups	4 cups
BOYS	9-13 yrs old	1 ½ cups	5 ½ cups	1 ½ cups	5 cups	4 cups
	14-18 yrs old	2 cups	6 cups	2 cups	6 cups	5 cups
WOMEN	19-30 yrs old	1 ½ cups	5 ½ cups	1 ½ cups	5 cups	4 cups
	31-50 yrs old	1 ½ cups	5 ½ cups	1 ½ cups	5 cups	4 cups
	51+ yrs old	1 ½ cups	4 cups	1 cup	4 cups	3 ½ cups
MEN	19-30 yrs old	2 cups	6 cups	2 cups	6 cups	5 cups
	31-50 yrs old	2 cups	6 cups	2 cups	6 cups	5 cups
	51+ yrs old	1 ½ cups	5 ½ cups	1 ½ cups	5 cups	4 cups