Eating More Fruits and Vegetables Brings Healthy Benefits

What can come ready-to-eat, make a great snack, fight against disease and assist with weight loss? The answer: fruits & vegetables! They are essential components of a well-balanced diet. However, most Americans do not eat enough fruits and vegetables.

Most people benefit from eating more fruits and vegetables every day. This is the message behind the new health initiative Fruits & Veggies—More Matters recently launched by the Produce for Better Health Foundation and the CDC.

Vegetables and fruits are good sources of many vitamins and minerals. Studies have shown that vitamins A and C, of which many vegetables and fruits are great sources, may help prevent diseases such as cancer and heart disease. Folate, found in fruits and vegetables, is needed for healthy tissues and red blood cells. It also plays an important role in reducing the risks for neural tube defects and heart disease. Potassium and magnesium, found in fruits and vegetables, are important for muscle and nerve function. Potassium is also necessary for maintaining a regular heart rhythm and the body's fluid balance. Some vegetables and fruits, especially those with edible skins and seeds, are good sources of fiber, important for a healthy gastrointestinal tract. Dark, leafy greens and dried fruits contribute iron to the diet, a necessary component of red blood cells.

How many fruits and vegetables do you need to eat?
According to the latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the recommended number of servings varies depending on the individual's calorie needs. Recommendations range from 4-13 servings or 2-6.5 cups per day. Visit www.mypyramid.gov to find out how much you need each day.

All forms of fruits and veggies are important to good nutrition. Fresh, frozen, canned, dried and 100% juice all count. Most frozen and canned foods are processed within hours of being harvested, so their flavor and nutritional value are preserved. Canned foods are ready to use, and frozen foods require little preparation.

Color Your Plate with Fruits and Vegetables
To get a healthy variety, think color: red, dark green, yellow, blue, purple, white and orange. Eating a variety of different colors of fruits and vegetables, you give your body a wide range of valuable nutrients like fiber, folate, potassium and vitamins A and C. This colorful variety of fruits and vegetables may also help to reduce the risk of cancer, diabetes, stroke and other chronic diseases.

Weight control is another benefit of eating fruits and vegetables as part of a healthy diet. When eaten instead of other high-fat foods, it may make it easier to control your weight. Almost all fruits and vegetables are low in calories and fat and higher in fiber than other foods. This could help you to feel full on fewer calories.

Add More Fruits and Veggies Each Day
• Eat fruit with breakfast every day – add it to your cereal, low-fat or fat-free yogurt, oatmeal, waffles or pancakes
• Bring fruit to work for a mid-day snack
• Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables
• Eat a colorful salad at lunch – add fruit pieces too
• Snack on raw vegetables with a healthy low-fat or fat-free dip
• Eat at least two vegetables with dinner
• Enjoy your favorite beans and peas – add them to salads and low-fat dips
• Have fruit for dessert