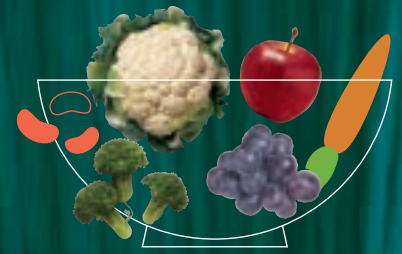




# Health Facts



## Eat Plenty of Fruits and Vegetables

You've probably heard it all your life—fruits, vegetables, and legumes are good for you, and it's important to eat them every day.

But, it helps to know why. Fruits, vegetables, and legumes (dry beans and peas) may *reduce the risk of several chronic diseases*. Compared to people who eat few fruits, vegetables, and legumes, people who eat higher amounts as part of a healthy diet are likely to have reduced risk of chronic diseases, including stroke and perhaps other cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, and cancers in certain parts of the body (mouth, throat, lung, esophagus, stomach, and colon-rectum).

### A healthy diet is one that:

- Emphasizes a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products
- Includes lean meats, poultry, fish, legumes (dry beans and peas), eggs, nuts, and seeds
- Is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars
- Balances calorie intake with caloric needs

When increasing the amount of fruits, vegetables, and legumes you eat, be sure to eat them in place of less nutritious foods, not in addition to them.

The fiber in fruits, vegetables, and legumes is important. Diets rich in fiber-containing foods may reduce the risk of heart disease. Many fruits, vegetables, and legumes are also rich in nutrients, such as vitamins A and C, folate, and potassium.

When shopping for fruits and vegetables, choose an assortment of different types and colors to provide you with a variety of nutrients. Fruits, vegetables, and legumes (dry beans and peas) that contain vitamins A and C, folate, and potassium are listed in the chart to the right.

Eating fruits and vegetables provides other benefits, too. One is calorie control: many fruits, vegetables, and legumes are low in calories and high in volume and nutrients. So, if you're trying to lose weight, fruits, vegetables, and legumes can help you feel full without eating too many calories. Fruits, vegetables, and legumes are packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other nutrients. They can help you get the most nutrition out of the daily number of calories you're

supposed to eat. Remember, different vegetables are rich in different nutrients, so aim for a variety of vegetables throughout the week, including those that are dark green and leafy, orange, and starchy. And, don't forget dry beans and peas.

### HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

#### Fruits, vegetables, and legumes are packed with nutrients.

The chart below gives examples of fruits and vegetables for important nutrients such as vitamins A and C, folate, and potassium. For example, if you eat a 2,000-calorie diet, it is recommended that you eat approximately 4 1/2 cups of fruits and vegetables daily.

#### Sources of vitamin A (carotenoids)

- Bright orange vegetables like carrots, sweet potatoes, and pumpkin
- Tomatoes and tomato products (sauce, paste, and puree), and red sweet pepper
- Leafy greens such as spinach, collards, turnip greens, kale, beet and mustard greens, green leaf lettuce, and romaine lettuce
- Orange fruits like mango, cantaloupe, apricots, and red or pink grapefruit

#### Sources of vitamin C

- Citrus fruits and juices, kiwi, strawberries, guava, papaya, and cantaloupe
- Broccoli, peppers, tomatoes, cabbage (especially Chinese cabbage), brussel sprouts, and potatoes
- Leafy greens such as romaine lettuce, turnip greens, and spinach

#### Sources of folate

- Cooked dry beans and peas
- Oranges and orange juice
- Deep green leaves like spinach and mustard greens

#### Sources of potassium

- Baked white or sweet potatoes, cooked greens (such as spinach), and winter (orange) squash
- Bananas, plantains, many dried fruits, oranges and orange juice, cantaloupe, and honeydew melons
- Cooked dry beans
- Soybeans (green and mature)
- Tomato products
- Beet greens

One caution about buying packaged (canned, dried, or frozen) fruits and vegetables is they may contain added sugars, saturated fats, or sodium—ingredients you many need to limit.

There are three places to look on a package that give you clues about what is in the food: the ingredient list, the Nutrition Facts label, and the front label of the package.

Added sugars can appear on the ingredient list as brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, fruit juice concentrates, glucose, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, invert corn syrup, invert sugar, lactose, maltose, malt syrup, molasses, maple syrup, raw sugar, sucrose, and syrup.

This sample product ingredient list for frozen, sweetened strawberries shows you that it contains added sugars.

**INGREDIENTS: STRAWBERRIES, INVERT SUGAR SYRUP, CORN SYRUP.**

If fruits and vegetables are canned, dried, or frozen, use the Nutrition Facts label to check the calories, the nutrient content, and fat, added salt (sodium), and sugar. Use the percent Daily Value (% DV) to determine how much dietary fiber, vitamins A and C, and potassium, are in the food you select; 5% DV or less is low and 20% DV or more is high. If you want to meet recommended intakes for certain nutrients such as dietary fiber, vitamins A and C, and potassium, look for food high in those nutrients. For nutrients that you need to limit your intake of, such as sodium and saturated fat, select food that is low in those nutrients.

In addition, the label on the front of the package may contain claims about the product put there by the manufacturer. Use the claims on fruit and vegetable packages to identify foods with little salt (sodium) or added sugars. Examples include “low sodium,” “no added salt,” “no added sugar,” and “unsweetened.”

**Fruit, vegetable, and legume specifics:**

- Focus on fruit. Eat a variety of fruits—whether fresh, frozen, canned, or dried—rather than fruit juice for most of your fruit choices.
- Vary your veggies. Eat more dark green veggies, such as broccoli, kale, and other dark leafy greens; orange veggies, such as carrots, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, and winter squash; and beans and peas, such as pinto beans, kidney beans, black beans, garbanzo beans, split peas, and lentils.
- If you should eat a 2,000-calorie diet, you will need approximately 2 to 2 1/2 cups of fruit and 2 to 2 1/2 cups of vegetables each day and 1/2 cup of beans or peas most days (4 to 5 times a week).

**The menu below is an example of how you can incorporate fruits, vegetables, and legumes into a healthy eating plan at 2,000 calories.<sup>a</sup>**

Menu	
<b>Breakfast</b>	1 1/2 c cornflakes
	1 medium banana
	1 c fat-free milk
<b>Lunch</b>	Ham and cheese sandwich:
	2 oz smoked ham, low-fat, low sodium
	1 slice (3/4 ounce) cheddar cheese, natural, reduced-fat
	2 slices whole-wheat bread
	1 large leaf romaine lettuce
	2 slices tomato
	1 Tbsp mayonnaise, low-fat
<b>Dinner</b>	1 c carrot sticks
	1 1/2 c Chicken and Spanish Rice (see recipe below)
	1 c cantaloupe
	1 small whole-wheat roll
	1 tsp soft margarine
	1 c fat-free milk
<b>Snack</b>	1/3 c almonds
	1/2 c fruit cocktail, in juice, no added sugar
	1 c fruit yogurt, fat-free, no added sugar

Adapted from the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan. Available at: [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/index.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/index.htm).

<sup>a</sup> There is a right number of calories for you to eat each day. This number depends on your age, gender, activity level, and whether you’re trying to gain, maintain, or lose weight. To calculate your number, visit [www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines).

Chicken and Spanish Rice (makes 5 servings, serving size: 1 1/2 cups)	
1 c onions, chopped	1/2 tsp black pepper
1/4 c green peppers, chopped	1 1/4 tsp garlic, minced
2 tsp vegetable oil	5 c cooked brown rice (in unsalted water)
1 8-oz can tomato sauce	3 1/2 c chicken breast, cooked (skin removed), diced
2 1/2 c frozen peas	
1 tsp parsley, chopped	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In a large skillet, sauté onions and green peppers in oil for 5 minutes on medium heat.</li> <li>2. Add tomato sauce, peas, and spices. Heat through.</li> <li>3. Add cooked rice and chicken. Heat through.</li> </ol>	
To reduce sodium: Use one 4-oz can of no-salt-added tomato sauce and one 4-oz can of regular tomato sauce.	



State of North Carolina | Department of Health and Human Services | Division of Public Health North Carolina Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program | [www.ncdhhs.gov](http://www.ncdhhs.gov)

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For more information on the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, please visit [www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines).

