

September is National Fruits & Veggies Month

Did you know that September is National Fruits & Veggies Month? September is an ideal opportunity to draw greater attention to the health benefits of consuming fruits and vegetables. The theme is *Every Time You Eat, Have A Plant®*. Whether shopping, dining out, enjoying a meal with family, at school, or on the go, Every Time You Eat, Have A Plant®.

Everyone can benefit from eating more fruits and vegetables. Think of healthy eating not as a diet but a life-long habit. A habit is a repeated behavior that you perform without even realizing it. Creating new habits is the ultimate way to make eating more fruits and veggies easy. When it comes to building new habits, think progress over perfection. All attempts, not just successful ones, can help.

Habit change takes time and consistency, and some people give up too soon or start too big with their goals. Choose one to three small habits or goals to work on first. When that first habit or goal feels more natural or easier, it's time to work on other habits. Implementing small changes over time is typically the most effective approach for achieving lasting change.

When you eat a variety of fruits and vegetables, you'll get a range of vitamins and minerals to support good health. The American Heart Association recommends filling half your plate with fruits and vegetables as a way to meet the daily recommendations of 2 1/2 cups of vegetables and 2 cups of fruit each. All produce counts towards the goal of 4 1/2 cups, including canned, fresh, and frozen fruits and vegetables.

All fruits and vegetables contain vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients that may help prevent heart disease, cancer, and other illnesses. Some of these nutrients are fiber, potassium, folate, and vitamins A and C. The best way to get more nutrients is to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables in different colors.

Eat at fairly set times for meals, so you don't skip a meal and end up starving, making it difficult to make healthy choices later. Meals can be very simple, but aim to eat something nutritious and balanced at each of your planned meal times.

To increase your intake of fruits and vegetables, try adding one to every meal. Add spinach to an egg or tofu scramble at breakfast, a side salad to lunch, and a cup of sauteed mushrooms or roasted Brussels sprouts to dinner.

Repeated exposure is crucial for the acceptance of foods, especially in children. That is why I recommend offering them repeatedly, encouraging the family to at least try the food. Leading by example is the most effective way to get your family on board.

Pick a night of the week for some basic food prep so you always have quick food options available. Chop two to three types of vegetables, peel and chop two to three fruits.

Find a new cookbook or blog with healthy recipes and try a new recipe one set night per week, such as Sunday evenings. Learn how to create basic ingredients that add extra flavor and interest to everyday meals, such as a vinaigrette or herby sauce, which can elevate a side of vegetables or a simple home-cooked meal to something special.

Eat a piece of fruit after dinner every evening to increase your fruit intake.

Whether you cook at home or eat out, incorporating more colorful, nutritious, and delicious vegetables and fruits into your snacks and meals is essential for a healthy eating pattern.

Making positive changes to eating habits isn't always easy, but research shows that habit change is possible by repeating actions or behaviors in specific contexts over time.

With just a little effort and strategy, you can be on your way to eating more produce in no time!