



5 a Day and School-Age Children

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Choosing a Rainbow of Produce for Good Health

In the food world, fruits and vegetables have it all - a huge range of flavors, a wide variety of textures, a rainbow of colors and a list of health benefits that's hard to beat.

It's nearly impossible to overstate the health benefits of eating fruits and vegetables. Name a health problem in the U.S. and produce has probably been shown to help in its prevention and/or treatment. The incredible array of phytonutrients in plant foods has been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, macular (eye) degeneration, prostate problems, osteoporosis and many types of cancer.

Unfortunately, we are not taking full advantage of these health benefits. Studies by the Produce for Better Health Foundation show that Americans are eating only about $3\frac{1}{2}$ servings of produce per day - far short of the recommended minimum of five servings per day. For kids only 33 percent are eating the minimum two daily servings of fruit and only 29 percent are eating the minimum three daily servings of vegetables. Even worse, half the vegetables eaten by kids are white potatoes and a quarter is fried potatoes (fries).

The best way to get the power of produce is to enjoy as many different kinds and colors of fruits and vegetables as possible. Fortunately, all types of produce provide great taste - and promote good health. Fresh, frozen, canned and dried - they all count.

The NC 5 A Day Coalition, a statewide coalition promoting increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, urges all North Carolinians to eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day. It's important to remember that five is a healthy start, but 5 to 9 servings may be needed to get the full power of produce.

The good news is that a serving is smaller than most people think. One serving can be a medium piece of fruit; $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of cooked, canned or cut-up vegetables or fruit; 1 cup of chopped lettuce and other raw leafy vegetables; $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of 100-percent fruit or vegetable juice; $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of cooked dried beans and peas; or $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dried fruit. So, start counting your servings - and start feeling healthier!