



Staying Healthy Through the Foods You Eat: Ten Ways to Eat More Fruits and Vegetables

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Introduction

Fruits and vegetables are an essential part of a healthy diet. People who eat more fruits and vegetables as part of their daily diet are less likely to be overweight, and are at lower risk for developing heart disease, stroke, cancer, and other chronic diseases. (Aune, 2017) For this reason, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that we eat 5 to 9 servings of fruits and vegetables a day. (USDHHS, 2015)



That is great advice, but it can be a challenge if you are not used to eating that many fruits and vegetables every day. There are many good information resources that give ideas on how to eat more fruits and vegetables. You can find some of these in the *Resources* section of this publication.

Family and Consumer Science Extension Agents know a thing or two about healthy eating, as well. Following are recommendations from ten Virginia Extension Agents on what they do to get their daily servings of fruits and vegetables:

1 LaWanda Wright, FCS Agent King George County, Virginia

One of the ways I eat more vegetables in my diet is through breakfast. I cut up or shred vegetables to put them in my omelet, tortilla wrap, or veggie egg muffins (my children really like these especially if they are mini egg muffins). My husband and I use egg beaters.

2 Jaelyn Munson, FCS Agent City of Petersburg, Virginia

I like to make a mixed fruit salad for after dinner—it can be easy with just berries that you can rinse off and throw in a bowl and toss with a couple of sliced bananas. Berries could be blueberries, raspberries, blackberries or of course the popular strawberry. I usually try to make enough to have a serving for breakfast the next day. If I have more time I like to slice up a melon like cantaloupe or watermelon and use that in the fruit salad.

For veggies, I rely a lot on the frozen variety so I can shop and have them on hand for a few weeks without worrying they're going to go bad (although I do buy fresh too!). I prefer roasting them in the oven on a sheet pan and I spray them with organic olive oil and toss with a little bit of black pepper and garlic powder. I'll do this with broccoli, Brussel sprouts, sweet potatoes, cauliflower or carrots—or combine a couple to keep the taste buds happy 😊

3 April Payne, FCS Agent Spotsylvania County, Virginia

I pack a salad for lunch as often as possible. I keep fresh fruits and veggies at eyesight level in the fridge or on the counter for a quick grab. Instead of chips, I cut up veggies to eat with dips or hummus.

I incorporate AS MANY veggies as possible into a recipe. I often add more veggies than called for in the recipe or double the amount. I make smoothies with frozen fruit and kale/spinach.

Those are just a few tricks I do to increase my fruit and vegetable consumption.

4 Vanessa Santiago, FCS Agent
Frederick County, Virginia

Here are a few ways I eat fruit and vegetables myself:

- I add a handful of blueberries to my cereal in the morning
- I add spinach to the sauce when making whole wheat spaghetti
- We make homemade pizza with whole wheat flour, and we always top spinach over it before putting it in the oven or top it with arugula after it's been baked
- For a snack, I like to slice up an apple and have it with peanut butter

Hope that's helpful!

5 Glenn Sturm, FCS Agent
Gloucester County, Virginia

Here are the two approaches that work for me:

1. Planning, planning, planning – if I want to eat 3 pieces of fruit each day and 4 servings of vegetables each day, if I'm grocery shopping for the week that means I buy 21 pieces of fruit, and 28 servings of vegetable and hold myself accountable to eat a piece of fruit each meal, and two servings of vegetables each with lunch and dinner.

2. Make whole meals/recipes that already incorporate a variety of fruits or vegetables. Two personal favorites – crepes with fresh fruits and brown rice stir fry.

6 Karen Munden, FCS Agent
Virginia Beach, Virginia

I use lettuce instead of bread to make sandwiches.

I smash avocados and apply them on bread instead of mayonnaise or butter

7 Katrina Kirby, FCS Agent
City of Petersburg, VA

My tips along with a picture of some great deals I found are to “buy them when the price is right, whether or not you need them. Wash them and cut to your liking and then freeze at least half in separate bags. Cook the other's by spicing up your breakfast, lunch and dinner!” There are so many easy recipes to help do this.



I'm not sure what to do with that Poblano pepper yet 😊

8 Andrea Wann, FCS SNAP-Ed Agent
Abingdon, VA

My best tip: I really enjoy smoothies because you can have both fruits and veggies in them! I add a couple different fruits and a handful of fresh spinach with either fruit juice or milk. Smoothies make a great snack and afternoon pick-me-up!

9 Terri Alt, FCS Agent
Patrick County, VA

We substitute zucchini spirals or spaghetti squash for pasta all the time. With tomato sauce on it, you can't tell the difference. I also substitute cauliflower rice in place of rice all the time.

I add extra cans of beans to my chili and even a can of lower sodium fat free refried beans to my chili, as it disappears into it and thickens it up.

10 Amy Hawkins, FCS Agent
Mecklenburg County, VA

I have an 8-year-old who loves sweets (candy) and I am trying very hard to change that habit for her! I have started to make parfaits using different fruits, low fat Greek yogurt and topping with a sprinkle of Grape Nuts. Super easy and quite tasty! Including my daughter in the fun of preparing them has proven quite successful in her excitement about foods and eating more fruits.

As a family, we have steered away from most of the packaged snacks and have replaced them with fruits and vegetables: pineapple, strawberries, blueberries, carrots, broccoli, celery, and others. We also use fruit for dessert. We have even planted four blueberry bushes.



Additional Resources

USDA ChooseMyPlate

<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/eathealthy/fruits>
<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/ten-tips-add-more-vegetables-to-your-day>

Have a Planet: Fruits and Veges for Better Health

<https://fruitsandveggies.org/fruits-and-veggies/>
https://www.pinterest.com/fruits_veggies/?autologin=true

American Heart Association. How to eat more fruit and vegetables. Revised on February 17, 2017.

<https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/add-color/how-to-eat-more-fruits-and-vegetables>

References

Aune D, Giovannucci E, Boffetta P, et.al. Fruit and vegetable intake and the risk of cardiovascular disease, total cancer and all-cause mortality—a systematic review and dose-response meta-analysis of prospective studies, *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 2017;46(3):1029–1056.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyw319>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. *2015 – 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. 8th Edition. December 2015. Available at <https://health.gov/our-work/food-and-nutrition/2015-2020-dietary-guidelines/>.

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2020

HNFE-920NP