Eat a Fruit and Vegetable Rainbow

Eat your fruits and veggies! You have heard it over and over. Fruits and vegetables are super healthy foods because they contain fiber, which helps you feel full, and vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and phytochemicals, which improves the health of your body. Antioxidants and phytochemicals help your body fight off disease. You need about 1½ to 2½ cups of fruits and 1½ to 2½ cups of vegetables each day depending on your age and activity level. But you don't need to eat your fruits and vegetables all at once. Spread out your fruits and vegetables throughout your day. And when you choose fruits and vegetables, or are planning meals, think of the rainbow. The more colors you put on your plate or in your lunch bag, the healthier your meal and you will be. Try to eat a variety of the color groups listed below, at least 2 or 3, at each meal. Research indicates that antioxidants can work together like a team, each boosting the other's effects.

1. Red

Tomatoes and watermelon are loaded with lycopene, which may protect against cancer and heart disease. Lycopene is more available from cooked tomato products and juices than whole raw tomatoes. Watermelon is also an excellent source of citrulline. Other red foods: tomato juice, mixed vegetable juice, canned tomato products (tomato sauce, tomato paste, stewed tomatoes), tomato salsa, low-fat tomato soup, marinara sauce, pink grapefruit. Other red foods such as strawberries, raspberries, cranberries, red bell peppers, red pear and red apples contain anthocyanins, which are powerful antioxidants that have a beneficial effect on heart disease by inhibiting blood clot formation.

2. Orange/Yellow

Oranges, tangerines, peaches, nectarines, papayas, mangos, apricots, cantaloupes, carrots, yellow corn, pumpkin, acorn squash, winter squash and sweet potatoes all contain a variety of carotenoids, which reduce the risk of developing cancer.

3. Green

Fruits and vegetables such as avocado, honeydew melon, spinach, collard/mustard/turnip greens, green peas, and broccoli are high in lutein and zeaxanthin, which keeps your vision sharp and clear. Broccoli, Brussel sprouts, cabbage, Chinese cabbage/bok choi and kale contain sulforaphane, isothiocyanate and indoles, which help your body break down cancer causing chemicals in your body.

4. Blue/Purple

Blueberries, blackberries, blueberries, plums, prunes, grapes and purple potatoes are chock-full of anthocyanins, which prevent tumors from forming and suppress their growth. Frozen berries and grapes can be a convenient sources. Other sources include: purple cabbage, purple bell peppers.

5. White

Cauliflower offers the same cancer-fighting benefits as broccoli, its cruciferous cousin, and potatoes are a good source of vitamin C. Garlic and onions contain allicin, which some studies have shown to have antitumor effects. There's also some evidence that the sulfur

compounds in garlic and onions may ward off stomach and colon cancers. Foods in this group are also rich sources of flavinoids, including quercetin and kaempferol.

Family Field Trip

Take your family on a family field trip to a local farmer's market or your local grocery store's produce section. Count how many colors you see in the fruits and vegetables. Taste a new fruit or vegetable.

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