

Focus on Fruits

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005* recommends eating 2 cups of fruits every day, based on a 2,000-calorie diet. For example, that is one small banana, one large orange, and ¼ cup of dried peaches or apricots. You may need to eat more or less, depending on your calorie level.

Eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables as part of an overall healthy diet may reduce your risk for:

- stroke and other cardiovascular diseases.
- coronary heart disease.
- type 2 diabetes.
- certain cancers, such as mouth, stomach, and colon-rectum.
- kidney stones.
- bone loss.



FOODS IN THE FRUIT GROUP

Fruits are represented by the red band on MyPyramid, USDA's latest food guide, which shows that foods from all groups are needed daily for good health. This group includes all fruits—fresh, frozen, canned and dried. They may be eaten cut-up, whole, pureed, or as 100% fruit juice.

Eat a variety of fruits. To get the dietary fiber you need, make most of your choices whole or cut-up fruits rather than fruit juices. Commonly eaten fruits include: apples, apricots, avocado, bananas, berries (strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, cherries), grapefruit, grapes, kiwi fruit, lemons, limes, mangoes, melons (cantaloupe, honeydew, watermelon), fruit cocktail, nectarines, oranges,

peaches, pears, papaya, pineapple, plums, prunes, raisins, and tangerines.

NUTRIENTS IN FRUITS

Most fruits are rich in dietary fiber and nutrients while being cholesterol-free, low in fats, sodium and total calories.

Fruits Contain Several Nutrients:

Potassium—may help to maintain healthy blood pressure.

Dietary fiber—helps reduce blood cholesterol levels, may lower risk of heart disease, helps reduce constipation and diverticulosis, and helps provide a feeling of fullness with fewer calories.

Vitamin C—helps heal cuts and wounds, keeps teeth and gums healthy, and aids in iron absorption.

Folate (folic acid)—helps to form red blood cells, and is important during pregnancy to reduce a woman's risk of having a baby with a spinal cord or brain defect.

Phytochemicals—help protect against diseases, serve as antioxidants, detoxifiers, immune boosters and anti-inflammatories. Inflammation plays a major role in heart attacks, some cancers, allergies, Alzheimer's, and autoimmune diseases.

Fruit Sources of Each Nutrient:

Potassium—bananas, prunes and prune juice, dried peaches and apricots, pomegranates, cantaloupe, honeydew melon, grapefruits, oranges/orange juice.

Dietary fiber—whole or cut-up fruits, with skin. Fruit juices contain little or no fiber.

Vitamin C—pomegranates, guava, kiwi, oranges, grapefruits, strawberries, raspberries, cantaloupe, papaya, pineapple and mangoes.

Folate (folic acid)—oranges and avocados.

Phytochemicals—two common ones are anthocyanins (in blueberries, cherries, blackberries, and raspberries) and quercetin (in apples).

Deeply colored fruits and vegetables contain the most vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. This includes all purple, deep red, bright orange, bright yellow, and dark green plant foods. Enjoy some of every color daily.

HOW MUCH IS NEEDED?

Most people should eat about 2 cups per day. The exact amount you need depends on your age, sex, and level of physical activity. The following amounts are appropriate for people who get less than 30 minutes per day of moderate physical activity, beyond normal daily activities. If you are more physically active, you may be able to eat more while staying within your calorie needs.

For an exact amount for you, refer to the chart below or visit www.mypyramid.gov.

DAILY FRUIT NEEDS		
Children	2-3 years old	1 cup
	4-8 years old	1 to 1½ cups
Girls	9-13 years old	1½ cups
	14-18 years old	1½ cups
Boys	9-13 years old	1½ cups
	14-18 years old	2 cups
Women	19-30 years old	2 cups
	31+ years old	1½ cups
Men	19 years and over	2 cups

WHAT COUNTS AS A CUP?

1 cup= 1 cup fruit

1 cup 100% fruit juice

½ cup dried fruit

1 medium-sized piece of fruit

Other amounts that count as 1 cup of fruit:

Banana: 1 cup, sliced or 1 large (8" to 9" long)

Cantaloupe: ¼ of a medium melon

Grapes: 32 seedless grapes

Peach: 1 large (2¾" diameter) or 2 halves (canned)

Plums: 3 medium or 2 large plums

Raisins: 2 small boxes (1.5 oz. each)

Strawberries: about 8 large berries

Watermelon: 1 small wedge (1" thick)

For more 1-cup equivalents, visit

www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/fruits_counts.html

EASY WAYS TO GET YOUR FRUITS

- Keep a bowl of fresh, whole fruit on the counter, the table, or in the refrigerator.
- Breakfast cereal is delicious topped with bananas, peaches, or berries. Top waffles and pancakes with fruit, also. Another tasty breakfast choice is fresh fruit mixed with low-fat or fat-free yogurt.
- Add chopped or mashed fruits to muffins, quick breads, and other baked goods.
- At lunch, choose fruits from a salad bar. If you take your own lunch to work, include a fruit every day—a small container of applesauce, a banana, orange or grapes.
- Serve fresh fruit salads often. To keep the apples, bananas, and pears from turning brown, add acidic fruits like pineapple, oranges, or lemon juice.
- As an alternative to a fruit salad, serve fruit kabobs. Pineapple and peaches make delicious kabobs with a barbecue meal.
- Want a healthy snack in seconds? Keep a supply of dried, frozen, and canned fruit, as well as pre-cut packages of fruit pieces such as pineapple and melon chunks.
- Since dried fruit carries and stores well, it is an excellent snack choice to tuck in a purse or backpack. Remember that ¼ cup dried fruit equals ½ cup fresh fruit.
- Enjoy 100% fruit juice as a snack drink.
- Experiment with new combinations for dinner. Try tossing mandarin oranges, grapes, or dried cherries in your salad, or add crushed pineapple to coleslaw.
- Vary the texture of the fruits you eat to make meals and snacks more interesting—juicy oranges, crunchy apples, and smooth, creamy bananas.
- Enjoy baked apples, pears, or a fruit salad for dessert instead of cake, pie or cookies.
- When eating out, ask your server for fresh fruit for dessert—some cut-up melon, strawberries or raspberries.

ALL FRUIT DRINKS ARE NOT EQUAL

Only 100% real fruit juice has all the vitamins and minerals found naturally in fruit juice. Other fruit drinks have less real juice and more added sugar and water.

How Much Orange Juice Is In Your Glass?	
Drink	% Real Juice
Orange juice	100%
Orange juice drink	50%
Orange drink (such as Hi-C® and Hawaiian Punch®)	10%
Imitation orange juice Orange soda Imitation orange drink (such as Tang®) Powdered fruit ade mixes (such as Kool-Aid®)	0%

Always read labels and check the list of ingredients. Remember that the ingredients listed first occur in the greatest amount.

FRUIT TIPS FOR CHILDREN

- You are the role model for your children. Set a good example by eating fruit every day with meals or as snacks.
- On their bowl of cereal, make a smiley face with sliced bananas for eyes, raisins for a nose, and an orange slice for a mouth. Or, sprinkle some berries on top.
- Children enjoy helping in the kitchen. Depending on their age, kids can help shop for, clean, peel, or cut up fruits.
- At the grocery store let children pick out a new fruit to try later at home.
- Provide cut-up fruits for snacks and desserts.
- Spread peanut butter on apple slices, or sprinkle frozen yogurt with berries for a nutritious snack.
- Let children dip fruits like strawberries and melons into low-fat pudding or yogurt.
- Cut a banana into chunks and freeze for a snack or dessert.
- Make frozen treats by freezing 100% fruit juice in an ice cube tray or small paper cups. Just before the juice hardens, wooden sticks may be inserted. Children enjoy frozen fruit cubes or “fruitsicles.”
- Make your child a fruit smoothie by blending fresh or frozen fruit with fat-free or low-fat milk or yogurt.
- Decorate children’s plates with fruit slices.
- Pack a juice box (100% juice) in their lunch box, not a sugar-sweetened drink or soda.

- At fast food restaurants choose fruit options, such as sliced apples, mixed fruit cup, or 100% fruit juice.
- Instead of candy, offer raisins and other dried fruits, as well as fruit pieces and 100% fruit juice. Chewy fruit snacks and “fruit-flavored” beverages contain very little fruit.
- Make fruit kabobs using pineapple chunks, bananas, grapes, and berries.

NUTRITION TIDBITS

- Fruits differ in nutrient content, so vary your fruit choices every day.
- Choose canned fruit that is packed in 100% fruit juice or water rather than syrup.
- For the benefits of dietary fiber, choose whole or cut-up fruit, with skins, rather than fruit juice. Juice should be less than half of your daily fruit intake.
- Make gelatin by substituting 100% fruit juice for the cold water.
- Choose 100% fruit juice rather than fruit drinks that have sugar added and contain very little fruit juice.
- Some fruit juices, such as grape and apple, have little natural vitamin content. Check labels for brands that have been “enriched with vitamin C.”
- Frozen juice bars (100% juice) are healthy alternatives to high-fat snacks.
- For a morning business meeting, replace the donuts with cut-up fresh fruit and a yogurt dip, or offer a variety of fresh whole fruits.
- Check out the restaurants close to work and choose those that offer a good variety of fruits and vegetables on their menu.
- On a long commute, pack fresh fruit, cut-up vegetables, string cheese sticks, or a handful of unsalted nuts so that you won’t be tempted to eat a quick, less healthy snack.
- Select fruits with more potassium often—bananas, prunes and prune juice, honeydew melon, cantaloupe, dried peaches and apricots, orange and pomegranate juice.
- Applesauce is a fat-free substitute for some of the oil when baking a cake.

HOW TO RIPEN FRUITS

These fruits continue to ripen at room temperature after they are picked: apricots, bananas, cantaloupe, kiwi, mangoes, nectarines, peaches, pears, and plums. For faster ripening, put them in a loosely closed brown paper bag or a ripening bowl at room temperature. Ripening bowls are sold at many stores that sell home kitchen supplies. (Note: Plastic bags do not work.)

Some fruits will not ripen further once they are picked. Buy or pick the following fruits fully ripened and ready-to-eat: apples, cherries, grapes, grapefruit, oranges, pineapple, strawberries, tangerines and watermelon.

Once fully ripened, fruits may be stored in the refrigerator to lengthen storage time. Refrigerated bananas will turn dark brown on the outside, but the inside will remain light-colored.

PREVENT BROWNING OF CUT FRUITS

Keep cut fruits, such as apples, pears, bananas and peaches, from turning brown by coating them with one of the following:

- an acidic juice such as lemon, orange or pineapple juice.
- a commercial anti-darkening preparation, frequently called a “fruit protector,” such as Ever-Fresh™ or Fruit-Fresh®. Follow the manufacturer’s directions.

FRESH-CUT PRODUCE NEWS

USDA researchers have developed three techniques to prolong the shelf life of already-cut fruits available in grocery stores: slicing while holding under water, using heat and ultraviolet light. For more information, visit

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/is/AR/archive/aug05/fruit0805.htm?pf=1>

BEST BUYS

Compare the different forms of fruit to see which one is the best buy—fresh, frozen or canned. Buy fresh fruits in season when they are usually lower in cost and at their peak flavor. Avoid soft, moldy or bruised fruit. The bruises you cut away are wasted money.

Want more nutrition for your money? Frozen fruit juice is a better buy than soft drinks. Small fruits are cheaper than packaged cakes and candy bars.

FRUIT SHOPPING LIST

Plan ahead. Buy a variety of nutrient-rich foods for meals and snacks throughout the week. Take this basic fruit shopping list with you every time you go to the grocery store:

- apples
- bananas
- berries
- grapes
- lemons
- melons
- oranges
- seasonal items

Sources:

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