

FROM THE NUTRITIONIST

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Eat More Fruits and Vegetables

Nutrition information can be found everywhere — online, on TV, in magazines, and in countless books. While some of it is good, unfortunately much of the information ranges from misleading to completely false, and many people find themselves confused by contradictory advice. It's important to know where to turn for solid advice about healthy eating.

One source of sound nutrition information is known as the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These are research-based recommendations designed to help Americans make healthier choices, which are revised every five years in order to stay up to date with the latest science. One of the most basic recommendations: Increase vegetable and fruit intake. Science backs up the fact that these food groups are extremely important for good health. They are packed with vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients that can help achieve and maintain a healthy weight, improve digestion and decrease risk of cancer, heart disease and diabetes. Unfortunately, however, most Americans don't consume enough. Adults need at least 2 cups of vegetables and 1 ½ cups of fruit each day — and people with higher calorie intakes need even more.

Here are some tips that can help you eat more:

- Take a piece of fruit with you when you leave the dining halls to snack on later in the day.
- Ask for a double portion of veggies and single portions of other foods in the dining halls.
- Try adding an extra serving of fruits or vegetables to each meal of the day.
- Salad bars can be a great way to increase your intake of fruits and vegetables — but limit dressings and toppings that may be high in sodium and saturated fat.
- Add veggies to omelets for a nutrient boost — broccoli, spinach, tomatoes, peppers, and onions are a few popular omelet fillings.
- Sweeten oatmeal naturally with raisins, applesauce, or chopped fruit like apples, pears, or bananas.
- Top your pizza with peppers, onions, or other veggies instead of (or in addition to) meats.
- Load up your sandwich, wrap or burger with veggies like tomatoes, onions, shredded carrots, spinach, and guacamole.
- Vegetable soup can be a tasty way to get a dose of many different vegetables.
- Add vegetables to pasta dishes and casseroles for extra nutrition.
- Add banana or apple slices to a peanut butter sandwich.
- Fresh fruits and vegetables are great, but if they are not available, frozen and canned versions are also nutritious. Check the label to look for varieties that don't have added sugar or salt.
- Try something new — a new type of veggie or fruit that you haven't had before, or one prepared in a different way. You might be surprised and find new flavors you enjoy!

Andrea Hart, registered dietitian nutritionist and New York state-certified dietitian/nutritionist, is available for free, confidential, one-on-one counseling and as a speaker or facilitator for campus groups, panels or classes.