

More is better: Fueling your body with fruits and vegetables

Fruits and vegetables are an essential part of a healthy diet, providing the nutrients and vitamins we need to perform daily activities. Unfortunately, most people are not eating enough fruits and vegetables.

Not only do fruits and vegetables provide beautiful colors that can be appealing to the eye, but they also help to combat against certain diseases such as cancer. According to USDA's health and nutrition program, both fruits and vegetables have been known to reduce risk for heart disease, heart attacks, strokes, obesity, and type 2 diabetes. Incorporating fruits and vegetables into your diet also provides you with many nutrients that are often under consumed, such as potassium, dietary fiber, Vitamin C, Vitamin A, and folate.

To make it easier to add a variety of fruits and veggies into your diet, Valdez recommends following these six basic steps:

- **Half your plate** – each time you eat a meal or have a snack, fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables.
- **Add more** – add extra fruits and vegetables into a recipe even if it already contains them.
- **Substitute** – substitute fruits and vegetables in any meal as a healthier alternative to a food that has less nutritional value.
- **Stay Stocked** – stay stocked on canned fruits and vegetables without added sugars for a quick and easy meal prep.
- **Steam and Flavor** – add healthy sides to your meals by steaming vegetables and topping them with low-fat dressings, and herbs and spices.
- **Grab and Go** – put fruit and vegetables in places where you can easily grab them on the way out, such as in a bowl or sliced in the fridge.

To avoid getting tired of eating the same fruits and vegetables, trade out an ordinary side salad with something that offers a variety of both fruits and vegetables, Valdez says. For example, Dinner Tonight's Watermelon Cucumber Balsamic Salad or Black Bean Salsa are sides that can enhance any meal with the perfect amount of fruit and vegetables that you need. To learn more about the recipes, visit <https://dinnertonight.tamu.edu>

When it comes to eating fruits and vegetables, keep in mind that more is better. Most people need a minimum of 2 cups of fruit and 2.5 cups of vegetables each day, however, research is showing that there are greater health benefits in consuming at least 5 to 10 servings of fruits and vegetables every day. You can set goals for yourself based on your recommended caloric intake which will help you to reach your daily needs.

Diabetes Classes will be offered beginning Tuesday, April 30 at the Parker County Extension office. The class will meet each week through the end of May beginning a 5:30 p.m. The classes

are free and will be held at the Parker Extension Office, located at 604 North Main Street. For more information call 817-598-6168.