

## Making Fruits and Vegetables the Easy Choice!

In Texas, three out of four deaths are attributed to a chronic disease. However, studies show an intake of at least two and half cups of vegetables and fruits per day as part of a healthy eating pattern can reduce the risk of certain chronic diseases. March is National Nutrition Month, and an opportunity to discuss the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables. We know a healthy eating pattern including fruits and vegetables can help to lower risks of developing chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers.

Lifestyles are hectic; however, increasing fruit and vegetables can be easy. Here are a few tips for making fruits and vegetables the easy choice!

**Choose to make half your plate fruits and vegetables.** The rest of your plate should be one-quarter grains and one-quarter protein foods with low-fat dairy on the side. MyPlate is a guide to making a healthy meal yet not every meal will look like MyPlate. For example a sandwich may not fit in each portion of the plate; however, making a sandwich with whole grain bread, lean protein, a slice of low-fat cheese, and adding lots of vegetables with a side of fruit make a healthy plate.

**Choose a variety of colors.** The colors in fruit and vegetables are not just to make them look pretty. Fruit and vegetable colors are complex and those colors pack a healthy punch in reducing the risk of developing various chronic diseases. Be sure to vary the colors on your plate.

**Choose whole fruits and vegetables over juice.** Children and adults eat most of their fruits and vegetables in the form of fruit juice, which can contain added sugars and make it higher in calories. Choosing whole fruits and vegetables provides fiber, less added sugar, vitamins, and minerals. Eating patterns high in these nutrients have shown to reduce the risk of developing certain cancers.

**Choose to prep your snacks ahead of time.** Busy schedules can sometimes mean reaching for unhealthy snacks. During the weekend, package small snack bags of bell peppers, carrots, strawberries, or your favorite fruit or vegetable for the week. Place them in a spot you can see in the refrigerator. This may help to limit choosing less healthful and tempting snacks!

**Choose to make fruits and vegetables exciting.** Create a fruit and veggie contest. Making fruits and vegetables part of a child's healthy eating pattern establishes positive behaviors early. Children learn from watching you. Try having a fruit and veggie contest once a week. It can be a simple game of name five blue fruits! The prize could be choosing the fruit for dessert tonight.

**Choose to flavor your water.** Flavored drinks are in every grocery store. However, they can be full of added calories. You can make your own flavored water by freezing diced fruits or vegetables and adding them to your water. When you finish your water have the fruit or vegetable as a snack! It can be as easy as freezing slices of cucumber or whole raspberries and adding them to your water!

**Choose fruit and vegetables to start the day.** Fruits can be an easy choice at breakfast food. However, mix in some vegetables too. Try adding spinach to your eggs, avocado to your toast, or tomatoes to a breakfast sandwich.

Choosing fruits and vegetables can be an easy task, if you plan and prepare healthy options in advance. Making small creative changes can benefit your overall health. Overtime choosing more fruits and vegetables can help prevent chronic disease.

For more tips on improving your fruit and vegetable consumption, contact your local Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service county office at 903-473-4580 or visit them at [rains.agrilife.org](http://rains.agrilife.org). They are also on Facebook at [Facebook.com/pages/Rains-County-Family-Consumer-Sciences](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Rains-County-Family-Consumer-Sciences). Go and "Like" the page to keep up with the latest news, events, and programs offered by Family & Consumer Sciences in Rains County.

Sources:

Texas Department of State Health Services. Texas Chronic Disease Burden Report, 2010.

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: The Role of Nutrition in Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention, 2013.

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Total Diet Approach to Healthy Eating, 2012.

MyPlate, <http://www.choosemyplate.gov>

Written by: Danielle Hammond-Krueger, MPH, RD, LD, Extension Program Specialist, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, College Station, Texas. March 2015.

Here's a great recipe from our Dinner Tonight website that is a perfect way to celebrate National Nutrition Month!

## **Three Bean Salad**

Ingredients

1/4 cup chopped green onions

1/2 cup chopped green or red bell pepper

1/2 cup chopped red bell pepper

2 Tablespoons fresh parsley  
1 (15.5-ounce) can low sodium garbanzo beans, drained  
1 (15.5-ounce) can low sodium kidney beans, drained  
1 (15.5-ounce) can low sodium black beans, drained and rinsed  
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
1 teaspoon lemon juice  
1/4 teaspoon salt

**Directions:**

Combine first 7 ingredients in a large bowl. Whisk together vinegar, oil, pepper, juice, and salt; pour over bean mixture, stirring to coat. Cover and chill.

Yields 12 servings. Serving size ½ cup- Calories 128, Total Fat 4g, Saturated Fat .3g, Protein 5.8g, Carbohydrates 21g, Fiber 6g, Sodium 321mg

**Adapted from Cooking Light**

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information or veteran status.