

More is better: Fueling your body with fruits and vegetables

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. As part of Fruits and Veggies – More Matters Month, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service offers some easy ways to incorporate more fruits and vegetables in your daily diet.

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, says Amy Valdez, a health specialist with AgriLife Extension. For example, both fruits and vegetables have been known to reduce risk for heart disease, heart attacks, strokes, obesity, and type 2 diabetes, according to the United States Department of Agriculture's health and nutrition program, ChooseMyPlate. 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, you can set goals for yourself based on your recommended caloric intake which will help you to reach your daily needs.

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Sources: <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/vegetables-nutrients-health>

<https://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/easy-ways-to-add-fruits-veggies-to-your-day>

Also, for more information contact the local Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service office at 903-473-4580 or visit us at rains.agrilife.org. We are also on Facebook at Facebook.com/pages/Rains-County-Family-Consumer-Sciences. Go and “Like” our page to keep up with the latest news, events, and programs offered by Family & Community Health in Rains County.