

Squeezing In Your Servings

presented by the Salem Evening News

We Americans have a less-than-stellar record in the fruits and veggie department. We fall far short of the recommended 5-9 servings of produce daily, and the veggies we do eat tend to come in high salt or high fat packages like french fries and ketchup.

Why is this a constant barrier for people? Taste, convenience and cost are among the primary factors which determine our food choices, with health being much further down on the list when it comes to cruising the supermarket.

I've said before that the evidence for fruits and veggies are overwhelming; a person's risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and certain cancers go down dramatically when fruits and veggies are included in the diet. Produce is not only a nutrient powerhouse, but is a great ally in the battle of the bulge, as it is loaded with fiber (which provides a feeling of fullness) but is light on calories. And you'd have to have spent the last decade in a closet not to know about the compounds in fruits and veggies, phytochemicals and antioxidants, that may help slow the aging and disease process- two of the biggest concerns among aging baby boomers.

The good news is that sneaking in your "5 A Day" (the recommended daily minimum of 2 servings of fruits and 3 servings of veggies) isn't as difficult as you may think. For one thing, servings sizes are downright stingy by American standards; this means you can usually squeeze in several servings at a time with a little know-how (see chart). The key is to include fruits and veggies regularly throughout the day in your meals and snacks; if you come to the dinner table without having eaten anything green or fresh, you will have trouble catching up.



Sizing Up a Serving

Vegetables

- ½ cup of cooked or chopped fresh vegetables
- One medium sized carrot
- 1 cup raw leafy greens
- ¾ cup (6 oz) vegetable juice

Fruit

- ½ cup chopped fresh or canned fruit
- ¼ cup of dried fruit
- 6 oz (¾ cup) of fruit juice
- One medium sized fruit

Looks Like:

- half a baseball
- 3 ice cubes
- baseball
- V-8 single serve can

- half a baseball
- 1 ice cube or 2 match books
- Pineapple juice single serve
- One medium sized fruit

Here are some helpful strategies to boost your plate's nutrition throughout the day:

Breakfast bargains. Start your day with a few servings of fruits or veggies. Try a glass of 100% juice, such as orange or tomato, or make a smoothie by blending ½ cup frozen berries to 1 cup milk and 1 tsp orange juice concentrate. Add dried fruit to your morning grain by topping cereal with dried cherries, raisins, plums or currants. Add frozen berries to your maple syrup and zap in the microwave to pour over whole grain waffles or oatmeal. Make a veggie frittata by adding your favorite veggies to egg beaters or 3 egg whites.

Lunch Crunch. Pack a piece of whole fresh fruit to have alongside your typical fare; stack extra veggies on your sandwich- use fun breads like lavash or wraps to stuff in more extras like pickles, sprouts, cukes, shredded carrot and tomatoes. Use tupperware or old yogurt containers to make a "crush proof" carrying case for grapes and melon. Enjoy dried fruit, or Fig Newtons for a sweet dessert and a fiber boost.

Snack Attack. Supermarkets have come a long way in the produce department- now you can find a variety of bagged salads, pre-cut veggies and fruits in all sizes. Use cut up veggies and dunk in lowfat dip or salsa mixed with cottage cheese. Replace chips with an apple

spread or celery with peanut butter or a box of raisins. Dip baby carrots or bell pepper strips in hummus for a high fiber, low calorie treat.

Dinner Brigade. Here's where you can really catch up on the veggies if you've been a slacker all day. Serve a side salad with the main course, and use dark leafy greens (many of those bagged pre-washed salads are great time savers) like romaine and spinach for added nutrition. Heap on not one side veggie dish but two, alternating between old favorites like peas and carrots with new discoveries like sweet potatoes and beets. Add extra nutrition to salads by including other bright colorful veggies such as carrots, spinach and broccoli. Pair fruit with meat, such as cranberries or apples with chicken, for an added nutrition and flavor boost.

Divine Dessert. With fall fast approaching, it's a perfect time to finish a meal with poached pears or apples with a bit of cinnamon sugar sprinkled on top, or fruit cobbler. Top other desserts (such as frozen yogurt) with fruit, and choose oatmeal cookies packed with raisins and dried cranberries.