

Volunteer Leader Training Guide

Eat a Rainbow of Fruits and Vegetables

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Introduction

Fruits and vegetables come in many different colors – red, orange, yellow, purple, blue and green. Eating a variety of colors of fruits and vegetables every day is very important. Scientists are regularly reporting on new health benefits associated with fruits and vegetables.

Generally, people who eat enough fruits and vegetables as part of a healthy diet are likely to have a reduced risk of chronic diseases, including stroke and perhaps other cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes and cancers in certain parts of the body. A healthy diet is one that emphasizes a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fat-free or low-fat milk products.

Fruits and vegetables are available in a variety of forms – fresh, frozen, 100% juice, pre-cut, pre-washed or dried. Fresh apples, bananas, pears, oranges, grapefruit and cherry tomatoes can be left on the countertop or table for easy access. When it's time for a snack, grab a piece of fruit or a handful of cherry tomatoes. Frozen vegetables are quick and easy. Heat them in the microwave or on top of the stove. You can choose a single vegetable or a seasoned blend. Pre-cut vegetables and fruit are convenient but keep in mind; they will not last a long time. Once the fruit has been cut, it will begin to spoil in a day or two. Pre-washed and pre-cut salads in a bag makes meal time easy but don't assume the pre-washed salads are really clean. Rinse them thoroughly before making your meal.

Target Audience

- EHC leaders
- Adult audiences

Objectives

Participants will:

- Learn why fruits and vegetables are important.
- Learn the daily recommendations for fruits and vegetables.
- Learn easy ways to increase fruit and vegetable consumption.
- Learn the importance of food safety and storage of fruits and vegetables.

Main Teaching Points

- Why Fruits and Vegetables Are Important
- How Many Fruits and Vegetables Do You Need?
- Easy Ways to Increase Your Fruit and Vegetable Consumption
- Food Safety
- Storing Fruits and Vegetables Properly

Handouts

- Handout 1: How Much Fruit Is Needed Daily?
- Handout 2: How Many Vegetables Are Needed Daily or Weekly?
- Activity 3: Eat a Rainbow of Fruits and Vegetables Word Search

Suggestions for Teaching

- Review the lesson introduction and study the major teaching points.
- Make copies of :
 - Handout 1: How Much Fruit Is Needed Daily?
 - Handout 2: How Many Vegetables Are Needed Daily or Weekly?
 - Activity 1: Ask participants for additional ways to increase fruit and vegetable consumption.
 - Activity 2: Are You Getting Your Fruits and Vegetables?
 - Activity 3: Eat a Rainbow of Fruits and Vegetables Word Search

Why Fruits and Vegetables Are Important

People who eat more fruits and vegetables as part of an overall healthy diet are likely to have a reduced risk of some chronic diseases, including strokes, type 2 diabetes, some types of cancer and perhaps heart disease and high blood pressure. Fruits and vegetables provide nutrients that are vital for health and maintenance of your body.

Fruits and vegetables also provide other benefits as well. Are you concerned about the number of calories you eat daily? Many fruits and vegetables are low in calories and packed with nutrients or “nutrient dense”— a term that is becoming more popular in reference to diets. So, if you are trying to lose weight, fruits and vegetables can help you feel full. Fruits and vegetables are rich in different nutrients, so aim for variety. When eating fruits and vegetables, think of a rainbow and go for the reds, yellows, blues, purples, oranges and greens!

How Many Fruits and Vegetables Do You Need?

The amount of vegetables you need to eat depends on your age, sex and level of physical activity. In general, 1 cup of fruit or 100% fruit juice or ½ cup of dried fruit can be considered as 1 cup from the fruit group. Any vegetable or 100% vegetable juice counts as a member of the vegetable group. Vegetables may be raw or cooked; fresh, frozen, canned or dried/dehydrated; and may be whole, cut-up or mashed. Vegetables are organized into five subgroups, based on their nutrient content. The subgroups are dark green, orange, dry beans and peas, starchy and other. Distribute **Handouts 1 and 2, How Many Fruits and Vegetables Are Needed Daily?** Answer any questions.

Easy Ways to Increase Your Fruit and Vegetable Consumption

- Keep an easy to grab, pre-washed bowl of fruit on the counter, table or in the refrigerator.
- Refrigerate cut-up fruit to store for later.
- Make a quick smoothie using frozen fruit.
- Buy fruits and vegetables in season when they may cost less and taste better.
- Add frozen mixed vegetables to canned or dried soup.
- Add apples, raisins or pineapple chunks to salads like chicken, tuna or pasta.
- Start your morning with a glass of 100% fruit juice.
- For an afternoon snack, munch on raw vegetables like carrot or celery sticks.
- Vary your vegetable choices to keep meals interesting.
- Try crunchy vegetables, raw or lightly steamed.

Activity 1: Ask participants for additional ways to increase fruit and vegetable consumption.

Activity 2: Are You Getting Your Fruits and Vegetables? Ask participants to write down all the fruits and vegetables they ate the previous day. *Say: Did you have any fruit for breakfast? Did you have any fruit or vegetables for lunch? Snacks? Dinner? How many did you have from each of the color groupings?*

Activity 3: Pass out copies of **Eat a Rainbow of Fruits and Vegetables Word Search** handout.

Fruit and Vegetable Safety

Improperly handled fruits and vegetables can become contaminated with salmonella and *E. coli*, potentially leading to foodborne illnesses. It is important to handle vegetables and fruits (and all foods) properly to prevent food poisoning. Food poisoning is caused by eating foods containing bacteria or other germs which are harmful to health. Cross-contamination must be avoided.

By taking some simple steps, we can ensure that vegetables and fruits are safe to eat.

- Wash all vegetables and fruits under running water. Do not use soap or bleach.
- Scrub vegetables and fruits with tough skins with a vegetable brush to remove any dirt. Even vegetables and fruits that will be peeled (potatoes, squash, melons) need to be scrubbed to prevent contamination when they are cut. If there are bacteria on the surface of the fruit or vegetable, the knife could transfer those bacteria to the inside when we cut it.
- Do not drink unpasteurized juices. Unpasteurized juice may contain harmful bacteria that make people sick.
- Do not eat raw sprouts. Raw sprouts have been identified as a potential source of foodborne illness in the United States.
- Pack fresh produce away from meats in the grocery cart and in separate bags.
- Remove outer leaves of lettuce and cabbage.
- Use separate cutting boards for cutting up fresh produce and for meat.
- Clean cutting boards with soap and water. Sanitize with a solution of one teaspoon bleach per one quart of water.

Storing Fruits and Vegetables Properly

Storing fruits and vegetables properly is very important. Safe storage can keep you from getting sick from a foodborne illness. Fruits and vegetables should be stored unwashed. However, fruits and vegetables that are very dirty after harvest can be rinsed and dried well before storing. Wash them with cool, running water before eating. For fruits and vegetables, follow these simple storage tips below.

| Vegetable or fruit | Where to store |
|---|--|
| Onions, potatoes, sweet potatoes | Cool, dark place. Cut any green areas off potatoes – they are not safe to eat. |
| Bananas and tomatoes | Room temperature |
| Other vegetables and fruits | Lower refrigerator drawers |
| Leftover cooked or cut up vegetables and fruits | Refrigerator; use within 3-5 days. |

Some vegetables and fruits, which are not fully ripe, can be ripened by placing them in a loosely closed paper bag at room temperature. Add an apple to the bag to speed the process.

Certain perishable fresh fruits and vegetables (like strawberries, lettuce and mushrooms) can be best maintained by storing in a clean refrigerator at a temperature of 40°F or below. If you're not sure whether an item should be refrigerated to maintain quality, ask your grocer. Produce should be stored unwashed until ready to use.

Additional resources available: Eat Your Colors to Stay Healthy and Fit! Newsletter and display (Right Bite!)

References

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