

Fruits and Veggies Count -- Do You Know How Many You Need And How To Enjoy More?

By Diane Beth, MS, RD, LDN

Since September is celebrated as National and NC 5 A Day Month, it's the perfect time of year for the whole family to take the steps necessary to improve their health by enjoying more colorful fruits and veggies.

Not only do they taste great, but eating fruits and veggies is vital to good health. The nutrients they provide contribute to the health of all the organs of the body and help prevent cardiovascular problems, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers. However, most Americans and North Carolinians still do not eat recommended amounts. In fact, only about 23 percent of adult North Carolinians eat the recommended minimum amount of five servings of fruits and vegetables daily (based on a 1/2 cup serving).¹ This is particularly distressing in light of the fact that the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPyramid now recommend far more than just "5-A-Day." Depending on age and activity level, the guidelines suggest up to thirteen servings of fruits and vegetables a day. Unfortunately, most Americans are falling well short of what our bodies need to maintain good health.

There are many reasons why adults and kids alike don't get enough fruits and veggies in their diets. One primary reason is that they are confused – they don't know how many servings they should eat or what actually constitutes a serving. The following information should serve to clarify these questions.

How Many Servings?

The charts below, provided by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) and based on the Dietary Guidelines, show the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables needed for **less active** women, men, girls and boys. So, if you are moderately to physically active, consider these quantities as the bare minimum and aim higher.

¹ 2005 NC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data
http://www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/brfss/2005/nc/all/_frtindx.html

| Women | | |
|--------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Age | Fruits | Vegetables |
| 19-30 | 2 cups | 2½ cups |
| 31-50 | 1½ cups | 2½ cups |
| 51+ | 1½ cups | 2 cups |

| Men | | |
|------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Age | Fruits | Vegetables |
| 19-50 | 2 cups | 3 cups |
| 51+ | 2 cups | 2½ cups |

| Girls | | |
|--------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Age | Fruits | Vegetables |
| 2-3 | 1 cup | 1 cup |
| 4-8 | 1 cup | 1½ cups |
| 9-13 | 1½ cups | 2 cups |
| 14-18 | 1½ cups | 2½ cups |

| Boys | | |
|-------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Age | Fruits | Vegetables |
| 2-3 | 1 cup | 1 cup |
| 4-8 | 1½ cups | 1½ cups |
| 9-13 | 1½ cups | 2½ cups |
| 14-18 | 2 cups | 3 cups |

What is a Serving?

Now that you know how many servings you need, next it's important to learn what 1 cup and ½ a cup actually look like when talking about fruits and vegetables.

One large orange, a small apple, an ear of corn, or a large sweet potato each counts as **1 cup**. Sixteen grapes, 6 baby carrots, 5 broccoli florets, ½ cup of mixed fruit, or ½ cup of 100% juice

each counts as ½ **cup**. If in doubt, pull out your measuring cups or for more examples visit www.5aday.gov or www.MyPyramid.gov.

Remember that it all counts -- fresh, frozen, canned and dried. You choose what works best for you and your family.

Enjoying More!

Here are some suggestions of ways to add fruits and veggies into your day as part of a healthy diet:

- ◆ For breakfast -- add some fruit to your cereal.
- ◆ As a snack -- grab a piece of fruit or some dried fruit.
- ◆ At lunch -- eat a big salad with a variety of veggies and fruits.
- ◆ In the afternoon -- why not choose some raw veggies as a snack.
- ◆ At dinner -- enjoy two colorful veggies (fresh, frozen or canned) and eat fruit for dessert.

It's also easy to add fruits and vegetables to the foods you eat now—like soup, salads, pasta, cereal, and pizza.

Add frozen vegetables like peas, broccoli, or carrots to a casserole, pasta or soup. Add some pineapple and mushrooms to a pizza. They're delicious as snacks too, and they won't load you up with a lot of calories, fat, salt or added sugar.

Big Payoffs for Health

These three simple steps – knowing how many servings you need a day, learning what counts as a serving, and then adding more fruits and veggies into your day as part of a healthy diet – can have big payoffs. Fruits and veggies really do count. They have vitamins and minerals that can help protect your health. Most are also lower in calories and higher in fiber than other foods. As part of a healthy diet, eating fruits and vegetables instead of high-fat foods may make it easier to control your weight. For all of these reasons and many more, eating smart is great step to take in living a healthy life.

For more information and resources, visit:

The NC 5 A Day Program Web site at www.nc5aday.com/resources.htm

The Eat Smart, Move More...NC Web site at www.EatSmartMoveMoreNC.com

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site at www.5aday.gov.

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