

Make A Way to Eat 5 A Day!

We've been strongly encourages to eat more fruits and vegetables for over a decade now. . .how are Americans doing?

Scientists continue to reveal evidence that fruits and vegetables have nutrients that help promote health and reduce the risk of many chronic diseases. For more than a decade, the National Cancer Institute has been sending the message to eat more fruits and vegetables through its 5 A Day for Better Health Program. How many fruits and vegetables did you eat today? How are fellow Americans doing?

Since 1991, the National Cancer Institute (NCI), partnering with the non-profit Produce for Better Health (PBH) Foundation, has worked to promote the message of *5 A Day for Better Health* to millions of Americans in classrooms, grocery stores, on television, in the work place, on the Internet and other places. More and more evidence has been mounting that shows that high fruit and vegetable consumption helps prevent cancer, heart disease, stroke and has a preventive role in the development of birth defects, high blood pressure, asthma, digestive disorders, obesity and diabetes.

Increasingly, more energy than ever has been poured into the 5 A Day Program – which is the largest federal nutrition education program targeted to the general public. Since the release of the revised *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2000*, advocates for the 5 A Day Program are positive about the increased attention paid to fruits and vegetables. The new guidelines encourage Americans to “choose a variety of fruits and vegetables daily.” But the work is not over yet. Translating these recommendations into easily adopted behaviors is a continuing challenge.

The 5 A Day Program Goal.

The goal of this multi-year campaign to promote 5 A Day is to increase awareness of the importance of including fruits and vegetables in the diet and to give people constructive ideas on *how* to increase their intake. And according to a large survey conducted by the NCI and PBH, Americans are indeed more aware today about the need to eat *at least* five servings of fruits and vegetables a day than they were 10 years ago, even though there are still many obstacles that keep them from doing so.

Realization of the importance of eating five or more fruits and vegetables a day rose from only 8% in 1991 when the program began to 40% in 1999. The ongoing challenge is make it easier for Americans to be able to meet or exceed the recommendation of 5 A Day.

Continuing Challenges.

While *understanding* that fruits and vegetables are important for overall health is one step in the right direction, many Americans still find it difficult to eat more fruits and vegetables. Some people feel that fruits and vegetables are too expensive, spoil quickly or are too difficult to prepare. Other individuals find themselves on-the-go or in their cars so much of the time that grabbing a prepackaged snack or a fast food meal seems easier.

Still others find their options for fruits and vegetables are limited in the work place or restaurants – places where many Americans spend a good deal of time. Whatever the obstacles, the NCI and PBH Foundations are constantly working to point out the benefits of fruits and vegetables and provide tips to make eating 5 A Day easier.

The benefits of fruits and vegetables.

Besides being full of vitamins and minerals that are essential to overall health, there is strong evidence that fruits and vegetables help prevent certain chronic diseases like cancer and heart disease and reduce the risk of many others. Fruits and vegetables also provide many plant nutrients – *phytochemicals* – like antioxidants and numerous others that are considered beneficial to one's health.

Fruits and vegetables are good sources of fiber, are generally low in fat and do not contain cholesterol. Because most fruits and vegetables are low in calories but large in volume, they tend to be a filling alternative to high fat, high calorie snack foods.

What's in a serving?

Getting in at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day is not nearly as difficult as most people imagine. A single piece of fruit like an apple or banana equals one serving, as does ½ cup of cut fruit. A ¾ cup portion of 100% fruit or vegetable juice or ¼ cup of dried fruit is also a serving.

For vegetables, ½ cup of cooked vegetables or cut raw vegetables like corn, peas, or carrots constitutes a serving, as does 1 cup of raw leafy vegetables like lettuce or spinach. A ½ cup portion of cooked beans also counts as one serving.

A few easy tips to increase your fruit and vegetable intake.

Including the minimum of 5 fruits and vegetables each day is really quite simple once you become familiar with how much constitutes a serving and begin to *practice* including them more regularly in your diet. A few ideas for including servings of fruits and vegetables include:

At Breakfast:	Add a sliced banana to cereal	1 serving
	¾ cup 100% orange juice	1 serving
As a Snack	8 baby carrots	1 serving
At Lunch	Sandwich with tomato and lettuce	1 serving
	Apple	1 serving
With Snack	12 ounces (1 ½ cups) 100% fruit juice	1 ½ serving
At Dinner	½ cup steamed peas, 1 ear of corn	1 serving
each		
	A green salad with sliced vegetables	1 ½ - 2
servings		
At a Restaurant	A side of fruit or steamed vegetables instead of French fries	1- 2 servings
At Work	Request vegetables or fruits at meetings, in the cafeteria, or bring some from home.	

As you can see, getting to 5 A Day can be simple! Continue to pay attention as more information on the health benefits of fruits and vegetables in the diet are discovered and take part in the creative efforts designed to make it easy for Americans to meet the challenge of 5 A Day in your community.

References:

5 A Day News. 2(1), 2000.

Gershoff, S., *The Tufts University Guide to Total Nutrition*. 2nd Ed. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996.

Internet Site: <http://www.5aday.gov>. Accessed October 2000.

Internet Site: <http://5aday.nci.nih.gov>. Accessed October 2000.

Kurtzweil, P. Fruits & Vegetables: Eating Your Way to 5 A Day. *FDA Consumer*. April 1999.