

# Habits for a Healthy Life



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## Healthy Habit #1 — Eat 5 or More Fruits and Vegetables a Day

By Elizabeth George MD

If you can get this habit “under your belt” you’ll find that you’re well on the way to healthy eating. A diet that’s high in fruits and vegetables supplies many of the nutrients, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, phytochemicals that are essential to your body’s healthy functioning.

You choose the right oil and gas for your car to make it run; it’s important to give your body the right nutrients to help it run well. Also, focusing on getting a total of 5 or more fruits and vegetables a day, will help you eliminate many of the high calorie - low nutritional value foods that may be causing weight problems. With their high fiber content, fruits and vegetables provide more bulk and are slower to digest, so they fill you up and satisfy your hunger more effectively than many calorie packed snacks and sweets.

The very high sugar content of soda, candy, pastries and even the intense sweetness of artificial “diet” sweeteners, actually encourage your “sweet tooth” and stimulate your appetite. Just think about how one piece of candy usually leads to another, and another, and another. In contrast, the natural sweetness in a piece of fruit, coupled with its fiber content create a very satisfying snack or dessert. In other words, focusing on eating more fruits and vegetables helps “retrain” your taste buds, so there’s less craving for salty snacks and excess sweets in calorie packed, nutrient poor foods.

The big question in your mind might be “how am I ever going to eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables a day”? Surprisingly, it doesn’t have to take much effort. Here’s an example: in the morning have a small glass of juice, and a piece of fruit on whole grain cereal (*that’s 2*); at lunch, “lean green” and choose a large salad with a variety of vegetable topics (*counts as 2 more*) (add nuts, beans, low fat cheese, tuna, or grilled chicken if you like); have an apple or celery and carrot sticks for an afternoon snack (*that makes 5 so far*); have 1/2 cup mixed vegetables with your low fat meat and whole grain rice at supper, and fruit cobbler for dessert, and that makes a **total of 7** fruits and vegetables — and the basis for a healthy, satisfying day of eating.

Here’s another example: for breakfast have French toast with fruit on top; for lunch have yogurt with 2 kinds of fruit, topped with walnuts or almonds; have a veggie afternoon snack; start supper with a large mixed salad - and **you’ve got 6 so far!**

If you’re new at the fruit and veggie game, you can even start off with 2 or 3 a day and gradually add more to your daily habit. A portion is a medium piece of fruit, a cup of berries or other cut up fruit, a cup of salad, 1/2 to 3/4 cup of vegetables.

You can shop for your fruits and vegetables with your weekly shopping trip — remember to “shop the perimeter” of the grocery store. Also, we have wonderful produce stands in our area. And, many markets, restaurants and fast food places now make great salads and fruit packs readily available for your meal “on the go.”

When you’re shopping for fruits and vegetables, shop for a rainbow of colors. It turns out, by choosing a variety of colors you get a broad selection of needed nutrients. Blueberries, strawberries, blackberries, cranberries, raspberries are among the fruits highest in antioxidants - which may boost brain function that weakens as we age. Purple grapes can lower LDL (the “bad”) cholesterol and also improve arterial elasticity. Orange and yellow citrus fruits are high in vitamin C as well as potassium (a mineral important in blood pressure control). And orange produce like carrots, tomatoes and canteloupes are high in Beta Carotene - important for healthy vision. Dark leafy greens like spinach, kale, romaine and spring mix lettuce lower cardiovascular risks and are good sources of folate, which helps the brain age gracefully. In all of these, the high fiber and certain compounds are associated with lower cancer risks.

These are only a few examples of the bounty of nutrients that are available in fruits and vegetables. In fact, eating a variety of fruits and vegetables as part of a balanced diet is a better way to get your needed vitamins and minerals than a multivitamin pill.

Once you start to shop for fruits and vegetables, the rainbow of colors is so inviting, that it’s easy to come home with even more than your family can eat. But don’t worry, before your extras go bad, you can easily freeze them. You can steam the veggies another time with supper or make soup; you can make your own fruit slushies with frozen fruits (any kind works), yogurt, and juice for a great lunch! While you’re shopping, do some cost comparisons. 99 cents will buy you a small bag of chips (and 280 calories and 330 mg of sodium); for the same amount you can get 2 apples (80 calories each and “an apple a day keeps the doctor away”).

So join MAC4wellness and start your 5 OR MORE fruits and vegetables daily habit. Count your total daily portions and keep track on our chart for the next 21 days. Remember, if you can practice this daily for 3 weeks, you’ll be on your way to a lifetime healthy habit. Jane’s Market and Mercersburg Market are joining us to offer prizes for the grand “fruit and vegetable” champions. Send your 3-week total to [MAC4wellness@gmail.com](mailto:MAC4wellness@gmail.com); the winners will get a prize, and we’ll interview you, so you can share your suggestions for success! **5 or More: What’s YOUR score?**

### 5 or More! What’s YOUR score?

OCT				9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	TOTAL

It takes 21 days of practice to create a lifetime habit! Each day write in your daily total portions of fruits and vegetables. After 21 days, email your grand total to [MAC4Wellness@gmail.com](mailto:MAC4Wellness@gmail.com). Top scores win a prize and an interview to share your ideas for success!  
Mercersburg Area Council for Wellness