



## It's a Lifestyle

Vegetables and fruits are packed with fiber along with vitamins, minerals, and plant-based substances that may help protect you from heart disease, diabetes, and perhaps even cancer.

## Benefits of the Nutrients Found in Various Vegetable Subgroups

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DESE SFS

DESE School Food Services

205 Jefferson St  
P.O. 480  
Jefferson City, MO 65201  
[http://dese.mo.gov/divadm/  
food/](http://dese.mo.gov/divadm/food/)

Tel: (573)751-3526

## Why Should We Eat Our Vegetables?

Many Americans, especially children, are not eating as many vegetables each day as dietary experts recommend. Below is a brief overview of various vegetable subgroups and why they are a critical component to our diet.

### DARK GREEN VEGETABLES

Dark leafy green vegetables are excellent sources of a variety of vitamins and minerals. While promoting heart health and possibly preventing against cancer, the following vegetables can be easily incorporated in menus:

- ▶ **Broccoli** has both soft florets and crunchy stalks and is rich in vitamins A, C, K, folate, and fiber. Broccoli can be eaten raw, steamed, sautéed or added to a casserole.
- ▶ **Romaine lettuce** is also high in these nutrients. It is best eaten raw in salads, sandwiches or wraps.
- ▶ **Spinach** is especially high in iron, and tastes great eaten raw or steamed.

### RED/ORANGE VEGETABLES

This group of vegetables aids in the prevention of cancer, as well as heart disease and type 2 diabetes. This is due to their high levels of nutrients including antioxidants (cancer preventing), carotenoids and phytochemicals (plant-based).

- ▶ **Butternut squash** provides an excellent source of carotenes and tastes great when baked, boiled or roasted.
- ▶ **Carrots** are effective in promoting good vision and can be eaten raw, steamed, baked or roasted.
- ▶ **Red peppers** contain a high level of vitamin C and reduce the risk of a heart attack or stroke. This vegetable is prepared similarly to carrots.

- ▶ **Sweet potatoes** are a great source of vitamin B6 and C. They not only boosts the body's' antioxidant levels, but they are also easily incorporated in one's daily diet through baking, steaming or boiling.
- ▶ **Tomatoes** are excellent sources of lycopene which may be extremely protective against a variety of cancers. They can be eaten raw, baked, or grilled.

### BEANS/PEAS (LEGUMES)

Since legumes contain a large amount of fiber, they're effective in lowering cholesterol and managing blood sugar disorders. They also provide a relatively large amount of protein, which is beneficial for satiation.

- ▶ **Black beans** are low in fat and high in fiber making this bean very beneficial. They can be boiled or often come canned, but be sure to watch the sodium content.
- ▶ **Chick (garbanzo) beans** have the same benefits as most beans, while being prepared by soaking and boiling them. Their high protein content makes this bean a great meat alternate.
- ▶ **Kidney beans** are of similar nature to chickpeas. They must be soaked and boiled, but once cooked they are excellent sources of fiber, protein and antioxidants.
- ▶ **Lentils** are a low calorie, high nutrient bean that is a great way to aid in heart health. Prepare these by soaking and boiling, and then add them to soups.

### STARCHY VEGETABLES

Starchy vegetables are high-quality carbohydrates that are rich in vitamins, minerals and fiber. Unlike poor-quality carbs, such as white bread, regular pasta and other refined-grain products, starchy vegetables ample nutrition and are a great addition to one's diet when prepared in a healthy way. They also reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases by containing high amounts of vitamin C and B6.

- ▶ **Corn** is high in the carotenoid, lutein, which can protect against heart disease and macular degeneration of the eye. Cook this vegetable by steaming, grilling or boiling.

- ▶ **Green peas** have unique phytonutrients that provide us with key antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits. These can be eaten cold on salads or prepared by boiling or steaming.
- ▶ **Lima beans** give us energy to burn while stabilizing our blood sugar due to its complex carbohydrate content. These are best prepared after being presoaked and then boiled.
- ▶ **Potatoes (white)** are root vegetables that provide a good amount of fiber (especially when eaten with the skin), which helps lower cholesterol and reduces risk of type 2 diabetes. These prepared by baking, boiling, mashing and roasting.

### OTHER VEGETABLES

There are a variety of additional vegetables that can be prepared in a nutritious and appealing way to increase our children's daily consumption. Some examples are listed below.

- ▶ **Beets** have a protective role against colon cancer due to its fiber content and betacyanin.
- ▶ **Cauliflower** is an excellent source of vitamins C and K, aiding in cancer prevention.
- ▶ **Celery** is considered a super food for lowering blood pressure due to coumarin compounds and high levels of potassium.
- ▶ **Cucumber** is an excellent source of silica, which is a trace mineral that contributes to the strength of our connective tissue.
- ▶ **Green beans** are low in fat and are a great source of protein, fiber and complex carbohydrates.
- ▶ **Green peppers** have similar properties to red peppers and are one of the most nutrient dense foods available.
- ▶ **Iceberg** is a good source of choline, vitamin K and chlorophyll but is not quite as nutrient dense as Romaine.
- ▶ **Mushrooms** specifically white ones, are excellent sources of phytochemicals, copper, potassium, zinc and selenium. All of these aid in the optimal functioning of the body's mechanisms.