

FROM THE NUTRITIONIST

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Eat More Veggies

Most of us probably remember being told by a parent or caregiver to eat our vegetables. And they were right: we should eat our vegetables, and lots of them. Sadly, however, most Americans don't eat enough of this important food group. Some people think vegetables are too expensive, others say they don't like how they taste, while many other people aren't eating enough because they don't know how much is enough.

The average adult should aim to eat 2 ½ to 3 cups of vegetables each day — or more. You can't really eat too many vegetables if you consume them as part of a balanced eating plan. Because most vegetables are high in water and fiber and low in calories, they add a feeling of fullness or satiety to a meal — so you can feel full without eating more calories than your body needs.

Many studies show that people who eat more vegetables have lower rates of obesity, type 2 diabetes, cancer, and heart disease. Science points to vegetables' unique blend of fiber, vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients — literally “plant nutrients” — that have been found to be beneficial for health. Because different types of vegetables are higher in specific nutrients than others, it's best to eat a variety of vegetables of different types — like leafy greens, red and orange vegetables, and legumes.

Here are some easy tips to help you eat more veggies:

- Try something new — a new type of veggie that you haven't had before, or one prepared in a different way. You might be surprised and find new flavors you enjoy!
- Veggies have great flavors on their own, but you can add excitement with herbs and spices.
- Ask for a double portion of vegetables in dining halls and restaurants.
- Add veggies to omelets for a great boost of color and nutrients. Broccoli, spinach, tomatoes, peppers, and onions are popular omelet fillings.
- Top your pizza with peppers, onions, or broccoli instead of (or in addition to) meats.
- Vegetable soup can be a tasty way to get a dose of many different veggies.
- Increase your opportunities to eat veggies by choosing them for snacks.
- Add veggies to pasta dishes and casseroles for extra nutrition.
- Load up your sandwich, wrap or burger with veggies like tomatoes, onions, shredded carrots, spinach, and guacamole.
- Salad bars can be a great way to get a variety of veggies, but limit high-calorie toppings like croutons and salad dressing.
- Fresh veggies are great, but if they are not available, frozen and canned versions are also nutritious. Check the label to look for varieties that don't have added salt.
- Check out local farmer's markets and farm stands for great tasting, local produce. Or, plant a garden and grow your own!

Andrea Hart, registered dietitian nutritionist and New York state-certified dietitian/nutritionist, is available for free, confidential, one-on-one counseling and as a speaker or facilitator for campus groups, panels or classes.