Putting MyPlate on Your Table: Vegetables

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MyPlate, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) food guidance system, helps individuals use the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans to make smart choices from every food group. MyPlate includes an interactive, online guide that provides individuals with recommended food amounts to eat, based on gender, age and physical activity level. Personalized guides and other resources can be found at choosemyplate.gov.

This fact sheet provides an introduction to the vegetables food group.

Why Vegetables?

It is recommended that people of all ages fill half of their plate with fruits and vegetables at each meal. Vegetables offer many benefits, as they have a high nutrient content. Nutrients commonly found in vegetables are potassium, dietary fiber, folate (folic acid), vitamin A and vitamin C. Because vegetables offer a great deal of nutrients and only contain few calories and very little fat, they are an important part of weight management. People who eat vegetables as part of an overall healthy diet are more likely to have a reduced risk of some chronic diseases, such as heart disease, high blood pressure and certain types of cancer.

Which Foods Are in the Vegetable Group?

All vegetables and 100% vegetable juices count as part of the vegetables group. This includes fresh, frozen, canned or dried vegetables. There are five subgroups of vegetables:

- **dark green vegetables** such as broccoli, bok choy, collard greens, dark green lettuce, kale, spinach and watercress
- **red and orange vegetables** such as acorn squash, butternut squash, carrots, pumpkin, red peppers, sweet potatoes and tomatoes
- **starchy vegetables** such as corn, black-eyed peas, green peas, lima beans, potatoes and water chestnuts
- **beans and peas** such as black beans, garbanzo beans (chickpeas), kidney beans, lentils, navy beans, pinto beans, soy beans, split peas and white beans
- **other vegetables** such as artichokes, asparagus, avocado, bean sprouts, beets, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, cucumbers, eggplant, green beans, green peppers, iceberg (head) lettuce, mushrooms, okra, onions, turnips, wax beans and zucchini

How Much Is Needed From the Vegetable Group?

This chart shows the USDA’s daily recommendation for vegetable intake.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Daily Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>2–3 years old</td>
<td>1 cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4–8 years old</td>
<td>1½ cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>9–13 years old</td>
<td>2 cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14–18 years old</td>
<td>2½ cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>9–13 years old</td>
<td>2½ cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14–18 years old</td>
<td>3 cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>19–50 years old</td>
<td>2½ cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51+ years old</td>
<td>2 cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>19–50 years old</td>
<td>3 cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51+ years old</td>
<td>2½ cups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note these equivalents for 1 cup of vegetables:

- 2 cups raw spinach
- 1 cup cooked carrots
- 1 cup tomato juice
- 1 large baked sweet potato
- 1 cup cooked black beans
- 1 large ear of corn
- 1 cup raw, sliced cucumber
- 1 cup raw or cooked mushrooms
- 2 large stalks celery
- 1 large bell pepper
- 1 cup canned green beans

While it is not necessary to consume vegetables from each of the subgroups each day, try to eat veggies from each of the subgroups throughout the course of a week.

Tips for Getting Vegetables on Your Table

- Buy vegetables that are in season for better prices and optimum flavor.
- Always keep frozen vegetables in your freezer for convenience to add to any meal as a side dish.
- Buy canned vegetables for convenience, but select “reduced sodium,” “low sodium” or “no salt added” options.
- Include a green salad with dinner each night. Add any vegetables you have on hand to your salad such as baby carrots, grape tomatoes or chickpeas.
- Shred carrots or zucchini into many dishes such as meatloaf, casseroles, quick breads or muffins.
- Include vegetables as a pizza topping. Ask for mushrooms, green peppers or onions.
- Have a yogurt-based vegetable dip handy for dipping fresh chopped vegetables like cucumbers, broccoli, peppers or carrots.
- Add extra vegetables to meals such as lasagna and stir fry.
- Allow children to select a new vegetable to try while shopping. This will make them more engaged in the process and more likely to enjoy the vegetable.
- Always make vegetables available for toppings on sandwiches, tacos and baked potatoes.
- Add extra vegetables to pasta sauces, soups, stews and rice dishes.

References

