

From Ronda's Front Porch to Yours

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Creative Ways to Include Vegetables in Your Daily Diet

Are you consuming enough vegetables in your daily diet? Sometimes it is hard to make sure our family is getting the right amount of vegetables during the day. There are many health benefits that can come from eating vegetables. According to the USDA, eating a diet rich in vegetables as part of an overall healthy diet may reduce the risk for heart disease and other chronic diseases. Vegetables are loaded with nutrients that are necessary for good health and maintenance of our body.

Just how much do you need in a day? This varies depending on age, size, gender and physical activity. In general, the amounts vary from 2 to 3 cups per day. A complete list of serving recommendations can be found at www.choosemyplate.gov.

If you are having a hard time incorporating vegetables in daily meal planning, check out these tips from the USDA, Choose My Plate.

- 1) Discover Fast Ways to Cook – Cook fresh or frozen vegetables in the microwave for a quick-and-easy dish to add to any meal. Steam green beans, carrots, or broccoli in a bowl with a small amount of water in the microwave for a quick side dish.
- 2) Be Ahead of the Game – Cut up a batch of bell peppers, carrots, or broccoli. Pre-package them to use when time is limited. You can enjoy them on a salad, with hummus, or in a veggie wrap.
- 3) Choose Vegetables Rich in Color – Brighten your plate with vegetables that are red, orange or dark green. They are full of vitamins and minerals. Try acorn squash, cherry tomatoes, sweet potatoes or collard greens. They not only taste great but also are good for you.
- 4) Check the Freezer Aisle – Frozen vegetables are quick and easy to use and are just as nutritious as fresh veggies. Try adding frozen corn, peas, green

beans, spinach or sugar snap peas to some of your favorite dishes or eat as a side dish.

- 5) Stock up on Veggies – Canned vegetables are a great addition to any meal, so keep on hand canned tomatoes, kidney beans, garbanzo beans, mushrooms and beets. Select those labeled as “reduced sodium,” “low sodium,” or “no salt added.”
- 6) Make your Garden Salad Glow with Color – Brighten your salad by using colorful vegetables such as black beans, sliced red bell peppers, shredded radishes, chopped red cabbage or watercress. Your salad will not only look good but taste good, too.
- 7) Sip on Some Vegetable Soup – Heat it and eat it. Try tomato, butternut squash or garden vegetable soup. Look for reduced or low sodium soups.
- 8) While You’re Out – If dinner is away from home, no need to worry. When ordering, ask for an extra side of vegetables or side salad instead of the typical fried side dish.
- 9) Savor the Flavor of Seasonal Vegetables – Buy vegetables that are in season for maximum flavor at a lower cost. Check your local supermarket specials for the best in season buys. Or visit your local farmer’s market.
- 10) Try Something New – You never know what you might like. Choose a new vegetable. Add it to your recipe or look up how to fix it online.

Healthy salads are a good way to incorporate different vegetables into your diet. You can also add fruit to increase nutritional content by adding antioxidants. Try this recipe the uses in-season produce.

Spinach Salad with Strawberries

- 6 oz fresh spinach
- 1 c. fresh strawberries, sliced
- 2 large avocado, diced
- ½ c. feta cheese
- ¼ c. slivered almonds

Creamy Dressing:

- 1/3 c. light mayonnaise
- ¼ c. 2% milk

2 t. poppy seeds

4 t. apple cider vinegar

3 T. sugar

Combine spinach, strawberries, avocado, cheese and almonds in a bowl. For dressing, combine mayonnaise, milk, poppy seeds, vinegar and sugar. Whisk until smooth and mayonnaise is mixed well. Pour over salad just before serving.

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