

5-a-Day Keeps the Doctor Away

5 A Day for Better Health is a national program and partnership that seeks to increase the number of daily servings of fruits and vegetables people eat to five or more. Research shows that diets rich in fruits and vegetables may reduce the risk of cancer and other chronic diseases. Fruits and vegetables provide essential vitamins and minerals, fiber, and other substances that are important for good health. But you knew that. The hard part is how do you actually include 5 servings of fruits and vegetables in your diet on an average day? In this article, you will learn some easy ways to reach the 5 a day goal.



What is a "serving"?

To know if you are getting enough fruits and vegetables in your diet, it helps to know what is considered a serving of fruit or vegetable. This is the one time those larger serving sizes works for you instead of against you! A serving is:

- a medium-size piece of fruit;
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (6 fl. oz.) of 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice,
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked or canned vegetables or fruit,
- 1 cup of raw leafy vegetables,
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked dry peas or beans, or
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dried fruit.

Getting Started

Not sure how to eat 5 A Day? Start the day with 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice. Slice bananas or strawberries or blueberries on top of your cereal. Have a salad with lunch, and an apple for an afternoon snack. Include a vegetable with dinner and you already have 5 A Day. Remember, 5 servings is a minimal standard. With fruits and vegetables, more is better.

Keep things fresh and interesting by combining fruits and vegetables of different flavors and colors, like red grapes with pineapple chunks, or cucumbers and red peppers. There are so many choices when selecting fruits and vegetables. Have you ever tried kiwifruit? How about asparagus? Try something new that helps you reach your 5 to 9 A Day.

When you keep fruits and vegetables visible and easily accessible you tend to eat them more; for instance, store cut and cleaned produce at eye-level in the refrigerator, or keep a big bowl of fruit on the table. Prewashed baby carrots are available at many supermarkets and make a quick and easy snack that will leave you feeling much better about yourself than that bag of chips.

Cooking With 5 A Day

With just a few changes in how you prepare foods, you can ensure that you and your family get at least 5 a day. Here are some quick and easy tips that can help:

- Use a microwave or pressure cooker to quickly "zap" vegetables or a potato and retain their nutrients.
- Grill fruits or vegetables. When grilling, wrap vegetables in aluminum foil, or use skewers of pineapple, yellow squash, eggplant, nectarines, zucchini, or cherry tomatoes, onions, mushrooms. Place over medium-hot coals for a fun-to-eat and flavorful BBQ treat.
- Make a quick smoothie in the blender by puréeing peaches and/or nectarines, a touch of your favorite fruit juice, crushed ice, and a light sprinkling of nutmeg.
- Looking for a fun appetizer when you entertain? Try making spears of fruit by attaching strawberries, grapes, melon slices, or pineapple chunks onto small skewers. Use low-fat or non-fat yogurt for a dip.
- Here's a quick fruit salad you can make in less than a minute. Open a can of juice-packed mandarin oranges and empty into a bowl. Add a sliced banana, a sliced apple, and some blueberries or raisins.
- Cool off with a great treat! Pour 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice into an ice cube tray or popsicle mold to make juice cubes or popsicles.
- Sometimes you can eat some of your 5 to 9 A Day in its' own container. Kiwifruit comes with its own serving cup and cantaloupe with its own serving bowl. Just cut them in half through the middle and scoop out each half with a spoon.