

Colors Can Keep us Healthy

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Color is around us every day. We see color in the clothes we wear, flowers in bloom, and in the produce section of the grocery store.

Sometimes we get into a routine or a rut and we don't vary the color of our clothes or the colors of our fruits and vegetables. We get comfortable with what we know, with the things that are familiar to us.

As part of my job, I introduce fruits and vegetables to the participants in my classes. This has made me realize that, over time, I too have become comfortable with what is familiar to me. I would go shopping and buy similar fruits and vegetables week after week. My choices might change with the season, but I bought what I knew. I also bought what I knew I liked.

I now have a new appreciation when I am in the fruit and vegetable section of the grocery store.

I see:

- red in the peppers, cherries, and pomegranates
- orange in the acorn squash, persimmons and kumquats
- yellow in the spaghetti squash and pineapple
- green in the collards, spinach, and grapes
- blue and purple in the eggplant, plums, and grapes
- white and tan in the mushrooms, cauliflower, and bananas.

The colors not only make my meals look tastier, I know they are more nutritious for me.

- Most fruits and vegetables are naturally low in fat and calories. None contain cholesterol.
- Fruits and vegetables are an important source of many nutrients, including potassium, dietary fiber, folic acid, and vitamin C.
- Vegetables are also an important source of vitamins A and E.

People who eat more fruits and vegetables as part of an overall healthy diet are likely to have a reduced risk of some chronic diseases, stroke and cardiovascular diseases.

Eating fruits and vegetables rich in potassium such as bananas, cantaloupe, sweet potatoes, or kidney beans may reduce the risk of developing kidney stones and may help to decrease bone loss.

Eating fruits and vegetables that are low in calories per cup, instead of some other high-calorie food, may be useful in helping to lower total calorie intake.

Today, many fruits and vegetables are also available in cans, jars, and the freezer section. Adding fresh, canned, or frozen vegetables to a recipe is a simple way to increase the amount and variety of vegetables one eats. Fresh or frozen fruits can be added to yogurt, cereal, or waffles.

I used to buy just the fruits and vegetables that I liked and knew how to prepare. Now I am more adventurous. I know that my taste buds will change over time, and that I may need to try new fruits or vegetables many times before I truly like them. I know that colors can keep me healthy.

March is National Nutrition Month. Challenge yourself or your family to try one fruit or vegetable that you have never eaten before. This will give you the opportunity to explore new tastes. You may find a welcome addition to your usual diet.

The American Dietetic Association sponsors an annual campaign during the month of March to provide information on healthy eating and being more physically active. Initiated in March 1973 as a week-long event, "National Nutrition Week" became a month-long observance in 1980 in response to growing public interest in nutrition. For more information, visit www.eatright.org/nnm. Additional information can be located at: www.mypyramid.org

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