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NF93-116 Food Guide Pyramid Fruit Group

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Food Guide Pyramid *Fruit Group*

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Overview

The United States Department of Agriculture's Food Guide Pyramid outlines foods individuals over two years of age should eat each day to maintain a well-rounded diet. This general nutrition guide encourages Americans to eat a variety of foods from each of five basic food groups. Each food group provides important nutrients, and substituting one food group for another may result in a lack of some nutrients.

A sixth food group includes fats, oil and sweets. Foods in this group provide energy, but very little other nutritional value. Most people should use foods from this group sparingly.

This fact sheet provides a closer look at the **Fruit Group**. The Pyramid recommends consuming two to four servings of fruits and juices daily.

Fitting Fruits Into Your Daily Plan

If you are like many Americans, you could benefit by eating more fruits. Nationally, Americans eat about ten servings of fruit and juices each week, far fewer than the recommended two to four servings each day.

Orange or grapefruit juice, bananas, apples and applesauce are the fruits most often consumed by Americans, although a trip through the grocery store will show many other kinds of fruits that could be added to the diet. The following list includes some of the many fruits that you might choose to add both variety and nutrients to your diet.

- Apples
- Apricots
- Bananas

Berries, all types
Cranberries
Grapefruit
Grapes, raisins
Kiwifruit
Mangoes
Melons, all types such as cantaloupe, honeydew or watermelon
Nectarines
Oranges
Papayas
Peaches
Pears
Pineapples
Plums, prunes
Pomegranates
Tangerines

Fruit juices are also part of the fruit group. Drink them as a single juice or combination of juices. Juices should be labelled 100 percent fruit juice, not fruit-ades or fruit drinks.

Dried fruits, such as raisins, prunes or dried apricots, are other options. Those fruits are easy to pack in lunches and are convenient during long trips. Eat fruits whole and fresh, or include mixtures of fruits as salads or desserts with your meals. Whole fruits are higher in fiber than fruit juices

For convenience, fruits may be purchased canned or frozen. Fruits in heavy syrups have a higher sugar content and more calories than fruits packed in their own juice or water.

Why Include Fruits?

Fruits are good sources of the mineral potassium, as well as vitamins A and C. Potassium works in combination with sodium to contract and expand muscles, maintain water balance between cells and transmit nerve impulses. Fruits high in potassium include bananas, oranges, grapefruits, tomatoes, apricots and pineapples.

Nearly two-thirds of the vitamin C in our diets comes from fruits. Citrus fruits such as oranges, grapefruits or lemons are the best sources of vitamin C, but berries are also good sources. Vitamin C helps form the collagen that gives structure to bones, cartilage and muscles. Vitamin C also helps our bodies absorb iron from foods.

Deep yellow fruits, such as apricots or cantaloupe, are good sources of beta carotene. Beta carotene converts to vitamin A inside the human body. Some research hints at a possible link between beta carotene and prevention of certain types of cancer. While these studies are not yet complete, the evidence encourages us to add beta carotene from food sources to our diets.

Food energy from fruits comes mostly from fructose, a simple sugar. Fruits are naturally low in fat.

Fruits at Different Life Stages

Infants: Fruits become a part of infant diets after cereals have been introduced, typically around five to seven months of age. Infants tend to prefer mildly-flavored, strained fruits and juices. As infants gain

more finger control and teeth start to appear, mashed or soft fruit with more texture can be introduced. Because of possible choking, it is best to avoid small, round, whole fruit such as berries, grapes or cherries during the first year.

Toddlers and Preschool Children: By the age of two, young children should have two to four daily servings of fruits and fruit juices. The serving size for children aged one to six is 1/4 to 1/2 medium sized fresh fruit and two tablespoons to 1/3 cup of cooked or canned fruit. One-fourth cup of fruit juice is a serving.

School-Aged Children to Adult: Two to four servings of fruits should be a regular part of the daily diet. A serving of fruit for older children, adolescents and adults amounts to the following:

Fresh fruit: medium sized fruit
Canned, cooked or chopped fruit: 1/2 cup
Juice: 3/4 cup

Large sizes of fresh fruit probably provide more than one serving of fruit.

Summary

Include fruits as a part of your meals or snacks throughout the day. Their sweet flavor make them a favorite as a salad or as a low-fat dessert. Whole pieces of fresh fruit are easy to carry to work or school for lunches and snacks. Fruit toppings are a delight on frozen yogurt, ice milk, ice cream, pancakes, waffles and cereals. The variety of colors, shapes and flavors found in fruits can add interest and nutritional value to any meal.

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