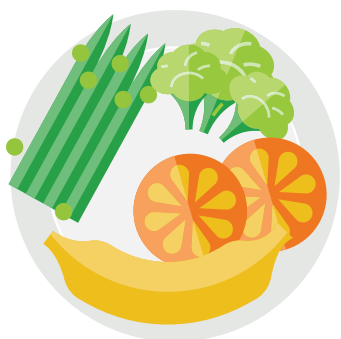


BOOST THE NUTRITIONAL VALUE OF EVERYDAY MEALS BY SNEAKING IN FRUITS AND VEGETABLES



BY JENNIFER LINTZ, RDN, LD



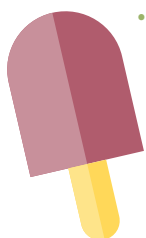
If there is one thing nutrition research makes clear, it's that fruits and vegetables are good for us and that we could benefit from eating more of them. Diets high in fruits and vegetables have been correlated with a lower risk of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and some cancers, among other chronic conditions¹. Not surprisingly, the USDA's 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend adults increase their fruit and vegetable intake². While the benefits of fruits and vegetables are clear, finding ways to fit them in isn't always easy. Eating a banana with breakfast, carrots as a snack, and steamed broccoli with dinner are all great options, but increasing your intake might require more out-of-the-box thinking.

Aside from eating fruits and vegetables on their own, entrees and side dishes are perfect places to sneak in even more nutrient-rich foods. Fresh, frozen, canned and dried fruits and vegetables can all count toward your daily total². To increase the odds you will incorporate more produce – regardless of the variety – into your meals, make sure you have some on hand year-round. Buy fresh options when they are in-season for the best quality and price and also stock the cupboards with canned green beans, peppers, tomatoes, peaches, pears and any other items you and your family enjoy. Don't forget the freezer! Keep it ready with frozen strawberries, pineapple, spinach, broccoli, and corn. If you garden or have access to large amounts of fresh produce during the summer and fall, freeze any extras to get ready for the off-season. For more disguised meals, freeze pureed fruits and vegetables in ice cube trays and transfer them into freezer bags for easy portioning later on.

Whether you are looking for options that are kid-friendly, adventurous, sneaky, or sweet and savory, there are plenty of ways to tie in fruits and vegetables with traditional dishes. Below are a few ideas to get you started.

KID-FRIENDLY

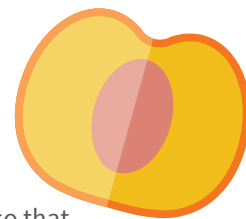
- Instead of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, try the peanut butter and banana version.
- Add fresh, frozen or canned fruit to flavored yogurt.
- When making a frozen pizza, slice up mushrooms, peppers and onion; or, create a Hawaiian-style pizza with Canadian bacon and pineapple.



- Stir in any vegetable you or your family enjoys for a nutritious twist on macaroni and cheese.
- Blend a mixture of frozen pineapple and berries and freeze it in ice cube trays with a toothpick or straw to create a popsicle.

ADVENTUROUS EATERS

- Make a breakfast smoothie with frozen peaches, raspberries and even spinach or carrots. To save time, make a large batch and divide the mixture into individual portions so that you can grab and go on busy mornings.
- Making lasagna? Sprinkle in a layer or two of spinach, tomatoes or peppers.
- Add blueberries or mashed bananas to pancake batter.
- Mix in fresh or frozen chopped vegetables like peppers, onions and spinach to scrambled eggs and omelets.
- For a meatless meal, top a baked potato with fresh salsa and any other extras you enjoy.



SNEAKY COOKS

- Grate carrots or zucchini and add to turkey meatloaf, burgers or meatballs. A cup of chopped veggies can be added for each pound of ground meat. The addition of vegetables will add both nutrition and moisture.
- For homemade and store-bought soups, stews and chili, double the vegetables by adding your own – canned or frozen. Cut up extra carrots and celery for chicken noodle, carrots and potatoes for beef stew, and diced tomatoes for tomato basil or chili.
- Whether you start from scratch or not, spaghetti sauce has plenty of room for extra tomatoes, basil, onions, peppers, mushrooms and spinach.
- Instead of keeping chocolate chip cookies on hand, bake items that incorporate fruit and vegetables such as banana bread, pumpkin bars, apple crisp or zucchini muffins.

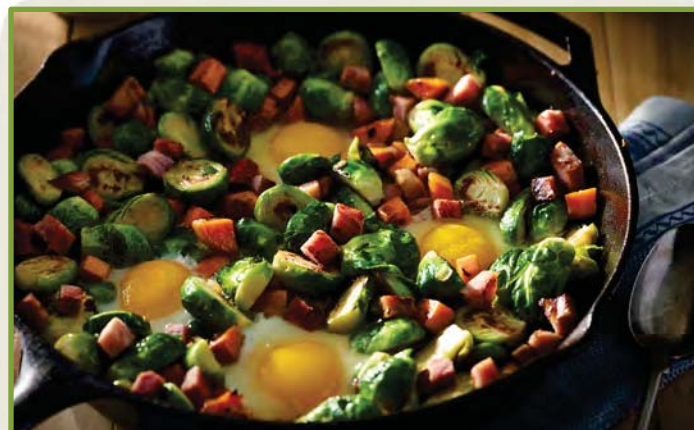
SWEET AND SAVORY

- Mix in apples, grapes or raisins to chicken salad.
- When making sandwiches, wraps, or paninis, consider combinations like sliced turkey with brie and pear or ham with cheddar and apple.
- For a sweet twist on traditional meat dishes, try slow cooker pork tenderloin topped with an apple glaze or grilled chicken served with a homemade berry sauce.
- Make a fruit salsa using peaches or mangos for a little variety on Mexican night.



If upping your intake of fruits and vegetables is a goal for your family, try looking at your meals from a new angle by asking: “Could a fruit or vegetable be added to this?” Finally, if you come across items you have yet to explore, don’t be afraid to give them a try. Make it something the whole family can be a part of by voting on a “fruit or vegetable of the week” that you feature several ways. Bon a petit!

TRY THESE HORMEL® FOODS RECIPES!



BRUSSEL SPROUT HASH WITH SWEET POTATO AND HAM



HAM AND PEAR PANINI

References:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Strategies to Prevent Obesity and Other Chronic Diseases: The CDC Guide to Strategies to Increase the Consumption of Fruits and Vegetables.* Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2011.
2. U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010. 7th Edition, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, December 2010.*

This information is not intended as medical advice. Please consult your primary care provider or registered dietitian for more individualized recommendations.