

Eat your colors for better health

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Monday, 02 March 2009 18:46



Did you know that colors are good for you? Fruits and vegetables contain compounds called phytochemicals that give them both their color and aroma.

Phytochemicals are also found in beans, grains and other plants. A couple of the more common ones are beta carotene and lycopene. There is some evidence that a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains may reduce the risk of certain cancers, type 2 diabetes and is also good for the heart.

Phytochemicals are chemicals produced naturally by plants to protect themselves, but when consumed may also help humans protect themselves from disease. Fruits, vegetables and whole grains contain the largest amounts of phytochemicals. Refined foods such as sugar and alcohol do not contain phytochemicals. It is recommended that adults eat 2 1/2 cups of vegetables, 2 cups of fruit and 6 ounces of grains (of which 3 ounces are whole grains) each day. In addition to phytochemicals, these foods are rich in minerals, fiber and vitamins, and are low in saturated fat. It's better to eat food high in these nutrients than to consume supplements because foods have fiber and other trace minerals in them as well.

There are five color groups of vegetables and fruits. They are red, yellow/orange, blue/purple, green and white/tan. Eat a variety of colors in your diet for the abundance of nutrients you need to be healthy.

How can you get your family to eat more fruits and vegetables? If your children are young, try to get them to taste a variety of fruits and vegetables so that they get used to a multitude of flavors. As you are grocery shopping, make a mental note to check out some of the more unusual fruits and vegetables and then try serving them at home. Don't give up just because your child says they do not like something after tasting it once. Sometimes it takes time to develop a liking for some of the more strongly flavored fruits/vegetables.

Keep a colorful variety of fruit and vegetables washed, handy and ready to consume to encourage children to grab them for snacks. Include your children in preparing those multi-colored meals and the fun will follow!

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