

For Immediate Release: January 19, 2017

The mission of K-State Research and Extension Family and Consumer Sciences is to link education with life experiences to help people improve their lives, their families and their communities. Family and Consumer Sciences professionals support essential life skills including Community Development, Healthy Lifestyle Choices, Leadership & Volunteer Development, Relationship Development and Resource Management.

Martha Murphy
Wildcat District Extension Agent
Pittsburg EFNEP office

Eating Colorful Plant Foods

Research shows that the single best way to improve health is to eat plenty of naturally colorful fruits and vegetables — deep reds, orange, yellows, whites, blues, purples, blacks and greens.



Why care about colors?

Color compounds form more than 2,000 pigments in fruits, vegetables and whole grains. These colors make plant foods not only look scrumptious, but also contain strong antioxidants. In general, the deeper the color, the more powerful its healthful antioxidant action.

Plant pigments are just one type of naturally-occurring antioxidants. Other phytochemicals (“phyto,” pronounced fight-o, means plant) in addition to antioxidants help protect against the damaging effects of toxic substances. Eating a variety of plant foods allows their different phytochemicals to work together to help fight illnesses and disease.

Colorful plant foods provide many healthful qualities. Most plant foods are naturally low in calories, fat and sodium and are high in water content, vitamins and minerals. None contain cholesterol. Many are good sources of dietary fiber, which helps satisfy hunger and enhances bowel health. Fruit has natural sweetness.

Making a colorful diet common

Fruits, vegetables and whole grains offer an appetizing rainbow of colors. Since each color protects body tissues in its own way, the best way to power up your plate — and please your palate — is to eat a variety of colors and choices within each group each day.

Adults are advised to eat 2 to 4 cups of vegetables, 1½ to 2½ cups of fruits, and 3 to 5 ounces of whole grains per day.

Eating colorful plant foods offers many satisfying tastes and textures. For instance, you can select from a variety of fresh, frozen, dried and canned fruits and vegetables. For the most nutrients per calorie, choose fruits and vegetables prepared without added salt, sugar, syrup or sauces. Choose modest portions of juices, since they offer less fiber than other forms and it's easy to get surprisingly more calories from them.

Many brightly colored fruits, vegetables and whole grains are portable and require no preparation other than thoroughly rinsing them under cool running water, making them natural “convenience foods.” To help remind yourself and family members to eat them, store fruits and vegetables where you'll see them often.

For additional information, contact the Wildcat Extension District, Crawford County, 620-724-8233, Lette County, 620-784-5337, Montgomery County, 620-331-2690, Pittsburg Office, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP), 620-232-1930. Our website is <http://www.wildcatdistrict.k-state.edu/> or follow us on Facebook: Wildcat Extension District.

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