

Fantastic Fruit

Research suggests eating fruits and vegetables is linked to lower risk of many chronic disease and may help protect against certain types of cancer. Despite these health benefits, most people don't eat enough produce. Typically getting kids to eat fruit is easier than vegetables. So this month, let's start summer easy and just focus on fruit.

Go Tropical

We often fall into a routine on our grocery trips, typically buying the same produce; however, as the seasons change so does your fruit options.

Mangoes

Mangoes are loaded with vitamin C, a nutrient that helps wounds heal, promotes healthy gums and keeps your child's immune system strong. One-half cup of sliced mangoes provides more than two-thirds of the vitamin C children under 13 need per day. For an exotic afternoon snack, serve mango slices with a pinch of sea salt and a squirt of lime. Or, whip up a batch of mango ice pops. Simply puree fresh, ripe mangoes in a food processor, pour into ice cube trays, insert a wooden stick and freeze for a frosty 100-percent fruit treat.

Guavas

Rich in fiber, guavas can help keep your child's digestive system in top shape. Just one medium guava boasts 3 grams of fiber. That's more than you'd get from a half-cup of cooked brown rice or a small slice of whole-wheat bread. For an even bigger fiber boost, puree whole guavas with the skin on in shakes, smoothies and juices.

Avocados

"You may think they're a vegetable, but creamy avocados are actually an incredibly versatile fruit," says Jimenez. With heart-friendly nutrients like monounsaturated fat and vitamin E, avocados are a smart pick for cardiovascular health. Try them at breakfast for a new spin on "birds in a nest." Break one whole egg into half a pitted avocado and bake for 20 minutes in a 425°F oven. Serve with a spoonful of your favorite salsa.

Papayas

In addition to being rich in vitamin A, these pink-orange fruits provide an especially potent form of beta-carotene for healthy skin and eyes. In fact, the form of beta-carotene in papayas is three times easier for our bodies to use than the kind in carrots or tomatoes, according to a 2013 *British Journal of Nutrition* study. Because beta-carotene requires fat for optimal absorption, pair papaya with avocados and chopped fresh mint in a sweet yet savory salad.

Helps to Hydrate

During hot summer months fruit can assist in maintaining hydration. Here are a couple hydrating fruits:

Watermelon

There's a reason watermelon is a staple at picnics and cookouts. It's tasty and refreshing! But it's also made up of about 91 percent water and is a source of vitamins A and C and contains lycopene, fiber and potassium. So basically, it's a win-win summer food.

Grapefruit

Cool down with grapefruit. This tropical fruit is about 90 percent

water. Grapefruit is also low in calories and a good source of phytonutrients and vitamin C. Pink and red varieties also provide vitamin A and lycopene. Try it chilled for an energizing and hydrating addition to breakfast.

Local Favorites

Strawberries

Strawberries are rich in vitamin C, folate, fiber and potassium. Just 1 cup contains 160 percent of the recommended Daily Value of vitamin C, which is necessary for growth and body tissue repair, and for maintaining a healthy immune system. Fiber aids in digestive health and 1 cup of sliced strawberries provides 3.3 grams of fiber. Strawberries are rich in antioxidants including anthocyanins, which give them their bright red color.

Satsumas

Summer is not the optimal satsuma season, they are best enjoyed in the fall/winter; however, a local favorite worth mentioning the benefits. Satsumas are rich in vitamin C and fiber. Fun fact – The Jesuits brought the fruit here, starting groves in the 18th century on the Jesuit Plantation upriver from New Orleans. The groves were later re-cultivated farther south in Plaquemines Parish to provide greater protection from harmful frosts, and continue their today. (According to Wikipedia ;)

Monthly challenge:

Parents – Mix it up, try a new fruit this week.

Teenage Athlete – Add a fruit to each meal.