



BLEND Food Group Focus

Vegetables

“Vary Your Veggies”

Importance of Vegetables

Eating a variety of vegetables every day is vital for overall health. Vegetables provide nutrients the body needs to maintain optimal health and they also play an important role in the prevention of many chronic diseases. Most vegetables are nutrient-dense foods – low in calories and fat. No vegetables have cholesterol.

What Foods Are In The Vegetable Group?

Vegetables are organized into 5 subgroups based on their nutrient content. Some commonly eaten vegetables in each subgroup are listed below.

1. Dark Green Vegetables are low in calories and provide Vitamins A and C, Folate, Fiber, Potassium, Magnesium, and Calcium.

Bok Choy Broccoli Collard Greens	Dark Green Leafy Lettuce Kale Mesclun	Mustard Greens Romaine Lettuce Spinach	Swiss Chard Turnip Greens Watercress
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2. Orange Vegetables are good sources of Vitamin A, Potassium, and Fiber.

Acorn Squash Butternut Squash Carrots	Hubbard Squash Pumpkin Sweet Potatoes
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3. Dry Peas and Beans (legumes) are good sources of Protein, Fiber, Minerals, and Folate. These foods can be used as a vegetable or as a Meat & Beans (Protein) alternative.

Black Beans Black-eyed Peas Garbanzo Beans (Chickpeas)	Kidney Beans Lentils Lima Beans	Navy Beans Pinto Beans Soy Beans	Split Peas Tofu White Beans
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4. Starchy Vegetables are higher in calories than other vegetables. They are a source of carbohydrates and fiber. Watch your portion size of these vegetables when you include them in your meal plan.

Corn	Potatoes	Lima Beans	Green Peas
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5. Other Vegetables vary in their nutrient content and have unique contributions to our diets. Variety is key.

Artichokes Asparagus Bean Sprouts Beets Bell Peppers Brussels Sprouts	Cabbage, Cauliflower Celery Cucumbers Eggplant Green Beans Iceberg Lettuce	Mushrooms Okra Onions Parsnips Tomatoes Tomato Juice	Vegetable Juice Turnips Wax Beans Zucchini
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Vegetables are important sources of many nutrients, including Potassium, Dietary Fiber, Folate (Folic Acid), Vitamin A, Vitamin E, and Vitamin C. These nutrients are vital for health and maintenance of your body.

Health Benefits of Vegetables?

Eating vegetables provides health benefits – people who eat more vegetables (and fruits) as part of an overall healthy diet are likely to have a reduced risk of some chronic diseases. Eating a diet rich in vegetables as part of an overall healthy diet may...

- Reduce risk for stroke and perhaps other cardiovascular diseases.
- Reduce risk for type 2 diabetes.
- Protect against certain cancers, such as mouth, stomach, and colon-rectum cancer.
- Reduce the risk of coronary heart disease.
- Reduce the risk of developing kidney stones and may help to decrease bone loss.

USDA MyPyramid Recommendations

The total amount of vegetables you need to eat each day depends on your age, gender, and level of physical activity. Recommended daily amounts are shown in the chart below.

Age		Daily Recommendation*
		Total Daily
Children	2 to 3 years	1 cup
	4 to 8 years	1 ½ cups
Girls	9 to 13 years	2 cups
	14 to 18 years	2 ½ cups
Boys	9 to 13 years	2 ½ cups
	14 to 18 years	3 cups
Women	19 to 30 years	2 ½ cups
	31 to 50 years	2 ½ cups
	51+ years	2 cups
Men	19 to 30 years	3 cups
	31 to 50 years	3 cups
	51+ years	2 ½ cups

*Amounts are for those who get less than 30 minutes per day of moderate physical activity beyond normal daily activities. Visit www.mypyramid.gov for more information.

What Counts As A Cup of Vegetables?

In general, 1 cup of raw, cooked vegetables, or vegetable juice or 2 cups of raw leafy greens (spinach or lettuce in a salad) can be considered as 1 cup from the vegetable group.

- 1 medium boiled or baked potato (2 ½" to 3" diameter) = 1 cup
- 2 large stalks celery (11" to 12" long) = 1 cup
- 3 broccoli spears 5" long, raw or cooked
- 1 large raw whole tomato (3") = 1 cup
- 1 - 8" cob (ear) of corn = 1 cup
- 12 baby carrots = 1 cup
- 2 cups of raw spinach or lettuce = 1 cup

To learn more about the **Vegetable Group**, visit the USDA's MyPyramid website at: www.mypyramid.gov. While you are there check out the "**MyPyramid for Preschoolers**" section to help you and your preschooler eat well, be active, and be healthy.



Safety First!

- Certain vegetables may cause choking for 2- to 3-year-old children. Cut them into small pieces or cook them until they are soft.
- Always wash your hands and your child's hands with soap and water before preparing vegetables.
- Wash vegetables before preparing or eating them. Under clean, running water, rub vegetables briskly with your hands to remove dirt and surface microorganisms. Dry after washing.
- Keep vegetables separate from raw meat, poultry, and seafood while shopping, preparing, or storing.

Tips To Help You Eat Vegetables!

- **Buy fresh** vegetables in season. They cost less and are likely to be at their peak flavor.
- **Stock up** on frozen vegetables for quick and easy cooking.
- **Buy "easy to prepare"** vegetables. Pick up pre-washed bags of salad greens and add baby carrots or grape tomatoes for a salad in minutes. Buy packages of vegetables such as baby carrots or celery sticks for quick snacks.
- **Use a microwave** to quickly "zap" vegetables. White or sweet potatoes can be baked quickly this way.
- **Vary** your vegetable choices to keep meals interesting.
- **Try** crunchy vegetables, raw or lightly steamed.