

GETTING NUTRITIOUS FRUITS AND VEGETABLES INTO YOUR BODY IS EASY WHEN YOU PICK FOODS BY THEIR COLORS.

Everyone knows it's important to maintain a balanced diet if you want to live a long, active life. But sometimes figuring out which foods give you what nutrients can be tough. After talking to Susan Bowerman, MS, RD, who is assistant director of the UCLA Center for Human Nutrition and co-author of the book *What Color is Your Diet?*, *Choices* came up with a foolproof method that makes getting—and staying—healthy that much simpler: Eat by color!

The key to eating by color is to understand the notion that each fruit or vegetable, whether it's blue, red, or green, is made up of a different combination of phytochemicals. Phytochemicals are non-nutritive plant substances that have disease-prevention properties and give each piece of produce its specific color. "Each of the color groups of foods offers different health benefits to the body," Bowerman says. Therefore, by consuming a variety of foods in various colors, you are therefore digesting the full range of nutrients needed to keep your body healthy. Take a look at the following seven color groups. Eating by color is easier—and more nutritious—than you might think.

Red



Red fruits and veggies are loaded with lycopene, a natural pigment that aids in ridding the body of harmful bacteria that cause gene damage. Studies have shown that people who have a high amount of lycopene in their diet are less susceptible to heart and lung disease—and many forms of cancer. (Tip: The chemical form of lycopene found in tomatoes is more easily absorbed by the body if the tomatoes are cooked.) Foods in the red category include tomatoes, watermelon, red bell peppers, and pink grapefruit.

Orange



Did your mother ever tell you that eating carrots was good for your eyes? She was right! One of the most beneficial nutrients found in orange food is beta-carotene, which then is converted to vitamin A. Carrots, for example, are one of the richest sources of beta-carotene. In addition to preventing various eye diseases (cataracts, macular dysfunction) and improving night vision, beta-carotene also helps prevent cardiovascular disease and cancer. Foods that are in the orange category include sweet potatoes, mangoes, and butternut squash.

Orange/Yellow



Orange and yellow foods are rich in vitamin C and manganese. These nutrients contain antioxidants that boost the body's immune system, strengthen blood vessels, and help keep our skin and gums healthy. The more vitamin C there is in your body, the more your body is able to combat infection. Foods in the orange/yellow category include pineapples, oranges, yellow bell peppers, and orange juice.



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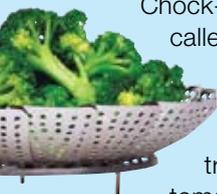
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Yellow/Green

Avocados and other yellow/green foods are high in potassium and protein. Green peas, for example, are second only to lima beans as a fresh source of protein. Eating these types of foods helps reduce the risk of becoming afflicted with osteoporosis, kidney stones, and high blood pressure. Foods in the yellow/green category include yellow corn, honeydew melon, and green peas.

Green



Chock-full of vitamin A, calcium, and a vitamin B derivative called folate (more commonly known as folic acid, in its synthetic form), green fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of energy and cancer-fighting nutrients. They also contain lutein and zeaxanthin, two phytonutrients that are crucial for healthy eyes. (Tip: Just as with tomatoes, cooked spinach is, in some ways, more nutritious than raw spinach.) Foods in the green category include kale, broccoli, romaine lettuce, and Brussels sprouts.

White



Garlic and other members of the onion family are high in allicin, a phytochemical that lowers cholesterol and reduces blood pressure. A leading antibacterial food, garlic battles health problems from the ordinary cold to cancerous tumors. Although white potatoes are starchy and high in carbohydrates, they also contain potassium, niacin, fiber, and vitamin B-6—nutrients that boost energy levels and maintain muscle performance. Foods in the white category include onions, cauliflower, and potatoes.

Purple/Blue



Blueberries rank No. 1 in antioxidant properties when compared with 40 other fruits and vegetables. Blueberries—and other purple/blue food items—contain anthocyanin, which helps in preventing blood clots and delaying the aging of cells in the body. In recent studies, these phytochemicals also have been linked with delaying the onset of Alzheimer's disease by preserving brain and memory function. Foods in the purple/blue category include eggplant, blackberries, and prunes.

Protein Power

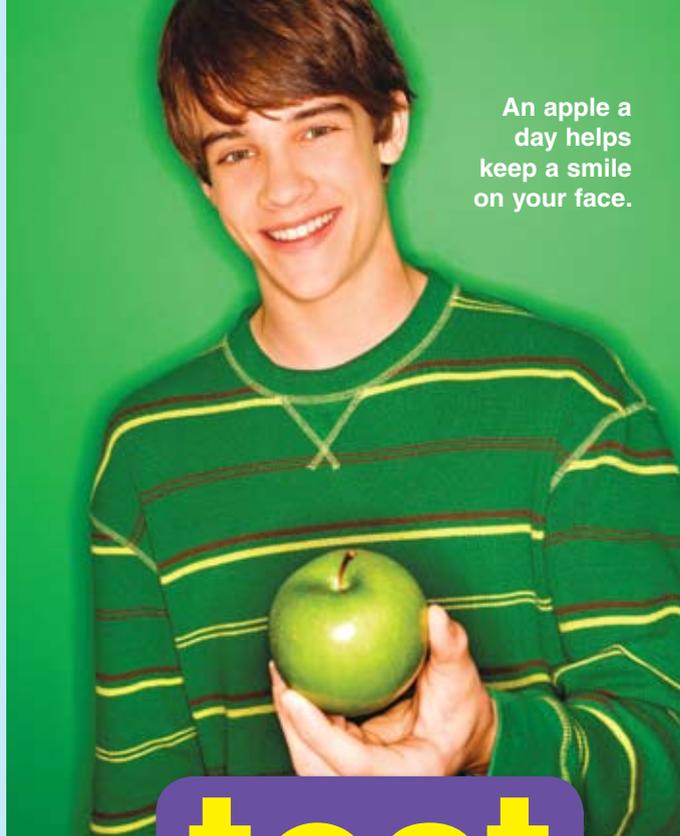


It's important to eat high-protein foods like meat and chicken too. Bowerman recommends sticking to foods that are low in fat, such as lean meats, fish, poultry, non-fat or low-fat dairy products, and eggs or egg whites. "There are also plenty of vegetarian sources," she says, "including soy protein powders and meat substitutes, tofu, edamame (Japanese soybeans), beans, split peas, and lentils" that will provide your growing body with protein.

The bottom line is that sprucing up your fish, poultry, or meat-based meals with colorful vegetables and fruits means it looks enticing and tastes great too. "It's just like budgeting spending money—you want to get the most for your dollar," Bowerman says. "That applies here—you want to get the biggest nutritional 'bang' for your calorie 'buck.'" The more colorful foods you consume, the healthier you will be. Bon appétit!

—Alexis Burling

An apple a day helps keep a smile on your face.



test YOURSELF

Are these statements true or false? Answers are in the Teacher's Edition.

1 As long as you're consuming fruits and vegetables from one color category, your body is getting all the nutrients it needs.

True False

2 Cooked spinach is more nutritious than raw spinach.

True False

3 A phytochemical helps ward off illnesses but does not affect the color of a specific food.

True False

4 Eating carrots helps improve the health of a person's eyes.

True False