



# Parents Ask

## Nutrition Chat with ARAMARK Dietitians

### Produce and Your Health

**PARENT: What makes fruits and vegetables so good for your health?**

**DIETITIAN:** Fruits and vegetables contribute a large portion of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants to your diet, which are important for staying healthy and preventing disease. Antioxidants can exist as vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals which are found in a variety of fruits and vegetables. Some phytochemicals found in carrots, berries, and grapes have been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease. Cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kale, and Brussels sprouts have been shown to reduce the risks for cancer and help protect against some cancers such as mouth, throat, and stomach cancer. In addition, fruits and vegetables such as bananas, cantaloupe, and potatoes are good sources of potassium that help regulate blood pressure. To reap the benefits that produce has to offer, be sure to eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables to get the best mix of health promoting nutrients.

**PARENT: Do different colored fruits and vegetables contain different nutrients; which ones are best?**

**DIETITIAN:** Fruits and vegetables of all colors contain a wide variety of vitamins and minerals but specific nutrients are usually associated with color. Orange fruits and vegetables contain beta carotene which is needed for healthy eyes and skin. Red fruits and vegetables are loaded with flavonoids which act as antioxidants in the body. Yellow usually means the fruit or veggie has a good amount of potassium which helps regulate blood pressure. Green foods like spinach and kale are good sources of lutein and folate. Vitamin C is readily found in orange foods like mangoes, oranges, and cantaloupes. No one fruit, vegetable, or color is best. The healthiest diet consists of a wide variety of different fruits and vegetables to get the best mix of health promoting nutrients.

**PARENT: How can I buy fresh fruits and vegetables while staying within my budget?**

**DIETITIAN:** It is possible to buy fruits and vegetables without spending a fortune. Buying produce that is in season or on sale is a good way to save. Shopping at local farmers markets is also an easy way to buy delicious fruits and vegetables at an inexpensive price. Farmers markets also allow you to continuously try new types of produce. Another great way to save is to start your own backyard garden. Tomatoes, zucchini, and salad greens are easy to grow and great to have on hand whenever you need them.

**PARENT: Do vegetables really lose their nutrients when you cook them and how can I prevent this?**

**DIETITIAN:** Some vegetables lose nutrients when boiled or over-steamed, especially those containing water-soluble vitamins like spinach, peppers, and broccoli. It is best to eat these veggies raw or lightly steamed or stir-fried. Fat-soluble vitamins such as carotenoids found in carrots are more readily retained when cooked. However, when it comes to some nutrients, such as lycopene found in tomatoes, cooking and processing actually increases the content. Overall there is no one best cooking method. A good rule of thumb is to include a variety of cooking methods like steaming, stir-frying, and roasting, while remembering to avoid overcooking, and include raw veggies in your diet.

**PARENT: How can I get my picky eater to eat more fruits and vegetables?**

**DIETITIAN:** It is important to always offer different fruits and vegetables. Children may like some right away and other foods may take a few attempts but don't give up. Kids like finger foods so keep cut up fruit and veggies in the fridge and serve with low-fat dip. Also provide them with options. Giving them the opportunity to choose between a few items will make them feel empowered and not "forced" to eat something. You can also have your kids help choose and prepare the vegetables and fruits eaten at meal time. Another thing you can do is find easy ways to add veggies and fruits to foods they already like such as adding tomatoes to grilled cheese, peppers to pizza, and fruit to cereal or yogurt.



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**PARENT:** I know I should increase my produce intake but how can I incorporate more fruits and vegetables into my daily life?

**DIETITIAN:** Fruits and vegetables can be great as snacks or with meals. There are many ways you can get more: aim to have a piece of fruit with every meal or make sure that most of your plate is made up of vegetables. You can also include more fruits and veggies into meals by adding peppers, tomatoes, or mushrooms to omelets or soups. Fresh fruits are a great addition to your cereal, oatmeal or yogurt, while adding extra veggies to your pasta, pizza, or salads can spice up any meal. Between meals snack on raw veggies with a healthy dip, frozen fruit smoothies, or pieces of whole fruit.

**PARENT:** I do not eat many fruits and vegetables, will including more of them help me with my weight?

**DIETITIAN:** Since fruits and vegetables are naturally low in fat and calories and high in fiber and other nutrients, they are important for weight management and overall health in general. Most fruits and vegetables are made up of mostly water which means you can eat larger amounts of them and still feel full while not loading up on calories. The fiber in produce also helps to slow digestion and can keep you feeling satisfied longer. Including fruits and vegetables as snacks and in meals can help control your cravings and prevent you from overeating. In the long run, fruits and vegetables play a central role in managing your weight.

**PARENT:** What are antioxidants and why are they important?

**DIETITIAN:** These are all components found in various fruits and vegetables and all play a role in promoting good health. Antioxidants include beta-carotene, flavonoids, lutein, lycopene, selenium, and vitamin A, C, and E. These antioxidants may help protect your cells against damage caused by oxidation that occurs naturally every day. Like a bicycle that rusts in the rain, our bodies' oxidation leads to deterioration and diseases. Eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables that are high in antioxidants can help reduce your risk for chronic disease.

**PARENT:** I want to try some new produce, what are some less well known or exotic fruits and vegetables?

**DIETITIAN:** There are over 200 types of fruits and vegetables so trying new varieties is easy. To start, try sampling different versions of fruits and vegetables you may already eat. For example try yellow tomatoes instead of red, golden kiwi instead of green, red pears instead of yellow, winter squash instead of butternut, and purple asparagus instead of green asparagus. Some delicious fruits you may want to consider include papaya, mangos, and pomegranates. Some interesting vegetables to try include artichokes, jicama, rutabegas, and watercress. For many more ideas check out [www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org](http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org).

**PARENT:** I eat only a small variety of fruits and vegetables so I was wondering which ones are the best to eat for health?

**DIETITIAN:** There is no one fruit or vegetable that is the best. It is important to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables because the different nutrients in them work together to keep you healthy. A good way to make sure you are getting a good variety daily is to eat as many different colors of fruits and vegetables as you can. For example have strawberries, blueberries, and a banana for your fruit servings. For your vegetables choose broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, and eggplant. Eating a rainbow of colors each day will help you get the variety and nutrition that you need.

*Our dietitians receive hundreds of questions each year about a wide variety of nutrition topics. Their timely and trustworthy insights and ideas can help you and your family live healthier lives. Since everyone's health history and nutritional needs are so different, please be sure to talk with your own doctor and registered dietitian to get advice about the diet and exercise plan that's right for you or your child.*