

## Lesson 7 *The Biggest Loser*

# Put a Rainbow on Your Plate

Last week, you learned about portions and serving sizes and were introduced to using a 9 inch plate for meal planning. Hopefully, you have started to fill 1/2 of that plate with a variety of non-starchy vegetables that can provide a multitude of vitamins and minerals as well as other health benefits.

If your daily meals include a variety of vegetables and fruits, it should look like a rainbow of color. A rainbow on your plate is more than just pretty, it's nutritious. Fruits and vegetables contain a variety of vitamins and minerals important for maintaining good health, but they also contain *phytonutrients*.

Some *phytonutrients* (nutrients from plants) are antioxidants that help protect us from cancer, inflammation, heart and artery disease, as well as other infirmities. Other phytonutrients protect our DNA, lower blood pressure, and/or help lower cholesterol. There are hundreds of phytonutrients we know about, and probably hundreds more we don't know anything about, but all are beneficial.

Many phytonutrients come with colors. Some are actually colored themselves, others travel with colored pigments. If you eat a variety of colors in fruits and vegetables every day, you will get a wide range of these important nutrients.



Red fruits and vegetables such as tomatoes, cherries, cranberries, beets, raspberries, red bell peppers, and pink grapefruit contain phytonutrients such as lycopene, Quercetin, Hesperidin. These nutrients are known to reduce the risk of prostate cancer, lower blood pressure and LDL cholesterol levels. They also help to scavenge harmful free radicals.

The orange and yellow group of fruits and vegetables include oranges, carrots, sweet corn, peaches, pumpkin, sweet potatoes, squash, cantaloupe and others. This group contains betacarotene, zeaxanthin, flavoniods, lycopene, potassium and vitamin C. They help reduce age-related macular degeneration and the risk of prostate cancer. They also lower LDL cholesterol and blood pressure, promote collagen formation and healthy joints and work with magnesium and calcium to build healthy bones.

There is a long list of green fruits and vegetables with leafy greens being the most talked about. But the green group also includes green beans, asparagus, peas, spinach, green apples, honeydew melon, broccoli, celery, cucumbers, cabbage, kiwi, among others. Green fruits and veggies contain chlorophyll, fiber, lutein, calcium, folate, vitamin C, calcium and beta-carotene. They reduce cancer risk, lower blood pressure and LDL cholesterol, help with renal health and vision, fight harmful free-radicals and boost our immune systems.

The blue and purple group of fruits and vegetables is well publicized because of blueberries and other dark berries which are considered to be the healthiest of all fruits. This group also includes grapes which have the antioxidant resveratrol, highly touted for its positive effects on coronary heart disease. Others in the black/purple group are blackberries, eggplant, purple figs, plums and prunes, raisins, endive, pomegranates, purple cabbage and the purple forms of broccoli, cabbage, asparagus, potatoes and an odd assortment of other vegetables that come in other colors, but also come in purple. This group has many of the same health benefits as other groups - lower LDL cholesterol, fight inflammation, reduce tumor growth, support renal health, improve calcium and mineral absorption and fight various forms of digestive cancer.

The last group is white fruits and veggies. It includes bananas, cauliflower, garlic, jicama, kohlrabi, mushrooms, onions, parsnips, potatoes, turnips, white corn, and the white forms of nectarines and peaches. They contain beta-glucans, EGCG, SDG and lignans that provide powerful immune boosting activity. These nutrients also activate natural killer B and T cells in the body, reduce the risk of colon, breast and prostate cancers and also help reduce the risk of hormone-related cancers.

No single fruit or vegetable provides all the nutrients you need to be healthy. The key lies in eating a variety of produce. To add more fruits and veggies to your diet, try these strategies:

- **Keep fruit out where you can see it;** you will be more likely to eat it. Keep it on the counter or in the front of the fridge.
- **Get some in every meal, every day.** Try filling half your plate with vegetables and fruit at each meal. Make salads, stir fry and other fruit and vegetable-rich fare. Eat fruits and vegetables for snacks, as well.
- **Try something new from the produce aisle.** Variety is the key to a healthy diet; get out of a rut and try some new foods from the fruit and vegetable section of your grocery store!
- **Throw extra veggies in soups, stews and casserole dishes.** Instead of plain old macaroni and cheese, stir in some cooked, chopped broccoli and put some sliced tomatoes on top.
- **Keep a storage container in the fridge of ready-to-eat vegetables.** This way your family will have them ready to eat as snacks, you will have ready-to-serve salad fixings and stir fry ingredients.
- **Add a variety of vegetables to breakfast omelets or scrambled eggs.** Mushrooms, broccoli, onions, peppers or whatever you like, will add a great deal of nutrition and taste to your morning meal.

Remember, the greater the variety of color you eat of fruits and vegetables, the wider your nutrition protection net will be. So put a **rainbow on your plate** and enjoy good health.

#### **References:**

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