

Sandra R. Kelly
For Better Living
Focus on Fruits and Vegetables to Help Manage Weight

Fruits and vegetables are known to provide vitamins, minerals and fiber essential for the normal, daily functioning of the human body. Research studies also have shown that eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables may reduce the risk for some cancers, heart disease and other chronic health problems. A recent review of the literature also indicates that substituting fruits and vegetables for more energy-dense foods can help people lose and/or maintain their weight.

The key to using fruits and vegetables to help manage your weight is to substitute them for higher-calorie, energy-dense foods. Most fruits and vegetables are naturally low in calories. Therefore, using fruits and vegetables instead of higher-calorie ingredients in your favorite dishes can lower the calorie content. The high water and fiber content of fruits and vegetables also will add volume to your dishes and make them more filling. This is important because studies tend to show that we regulate our intake more by volume than by actual calories consumed.

Here are some simple suggestions from the Centers for Disease Control for cutting calories by eating fruits and vegetables instead of more calorie-dense foods.

Breakfast

- * Substitute green peppers, onions or mushrooms for one of the eggs or half the cheese in your omelet. The vegetables will add volume and flavor to the dish with fewer calories than the egg or cheese.

- * Cut back on the amount of cereal in your bowl to make room for sliced bananas, fresh peaches or strawberries. The benefits - same sized bowl with fewer calories and more flavors.

Lunch

- * Substitute vegetables such as lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, grated carrots or onions for half to three-fourths of the meat and cheese in your sandwich, wrap or burrito. The new version will still fill you up but with fewer calories than the original.

- * Choose a vegetable-based soup rather than a meat or noodle-based one. If you're making your own soup, add twice the chopped vegetables called for and half the meat or noodles. The vegetables will help fill you up, so you won't miss those extra calories.

- * Choose an apple, orange or carrot sticks to go with your sandwich instead of chips or cookies.

Dinner

- * Add 1 cup chopped vegetables such as broccoli, tomatoes, squash or peppers while removing 1 cup of the rice or pasta in your favorite dish. The dish with the vegetables will be just as satisfying but have fewer calories than the original version.

* Take a good look at your dinner plate. Vegetables, fruit and whole grains should take up half your plate. If they don't, replace some of the meat, cheese, white pasta or rice with legumes, steamed broccoli, asparagus, greens or another favorite vegetable. This will reduce the total calories in your meal without reducing the amount of food you eat.

Snacks

* Fruits and vegetables make wonderful low-calorie yet filling snacks. For example, a medium-size apple, a medium-size banana or 1 cup of carrots, broccoli or bell peppers all contain 100 calories or less.

* Instead of a high-calorie snack from a vending machine, bring cut-up vegetables or fruit from home. One snack-sized bag of corn chips (1 ounce) has the same number of calories as a small apple, 1 cup of whole strawberries, AND 1 cup of carrots with a quarter-cup of low-calorie dip.

Source: Colorado Cooperative Extension Service

Veggie Dip

1 cup non-fat sour cream

1 T. chopped onion

1 T. seasoned salt

1 cup reduced-fat mayonnaise

1 T. parsley

1 T. dill weed

Mix all ingredients at least 12 hours before serving. Store in refrigerator. Serve with raw veggies. Also great on baked potatoes.