

Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables every day

Eating fruits and vegetables is one of the most important parts of a healthy diet. When you're making the commitment to eat healthier, a great place to start is by eating more fruits and veggies. Because they're lower in calories than most other foods, they can help you achieve or maintain a healthy weight. Plus, the natural sweetness of fruit provides a healthier, lower-calorie option for satisfying your sweet tooth.

Generally, the recommendation is to eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables per day; however, most Americans get just three servings a day. In general, one cup is considered one serving of fruits or vegetables.

Vegetables: One cup of raw or cooked vegetables or vegetable juice, or two cups of raw leafy greens can be considered as one serving from the vegetable group.

Fruits: One medium-sized piece of fruit, one cup of fruit or 100% fruit juice, or ½ cup of dried fruit can be considered as one serving from the fruit group.

With summer fast approaching, you are likely to find the freshest produce at farmers' markets and roadside stands since it is locally grown and, therefore, does not need to be shipped long distances. Not only will you have an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables to choose from, but you'll be supporting your local growers.

In addition, here are some other helpful tips:

- Stock up on frozen vegetables. Fresh veggies should be the first choice, but when they're out of season or you have limited time to prepare, frozen veggies can be a great option. They are frozen shortly after picking, so they retain all their nutrient-packed goodness.
- Keep a bowl of fruit on the kitchen counter or dining room table. Creating an environment with healthy snacks readily available will set you up for success in achieving and maintaining a healthy weight.
- Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables each day. No single fruit or vegetable can provide all of the nutrients you need to be healthy. Look for a variety of colors, such as dark-green, yellow, orange and red.
- Don't forget to wash your fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as your hand and contact surfaces as you prepare your food.

There is no better time than right now to increase your fruit and vegetable consumption – start with the ones you grow in your garden and try the ones your Western New York neighbors grow on their farms. A list of farmers' markets throughout New York state is available at www.agmkt.state.ny.us.