



One Health Tip All Experts Agree On

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As a nutritionist, I have consulted with many clients over the years about how to eat to improve their health. Since every individual has different nutritional needs based on their genetics, lab results and current lifestyle, each nutrition consult is different than the one before. In addition, nutrition messages have come and gone over the decades based on the latest research findings which may create the need to tweak a previous recommendation to the same person.

But, in spite of changing research and individual differences, one nutrition message has survived the test of time. Whenever clients ask me “What one thing can I do to improve my health?” My answer is:

“Eat 8 – 10 servings of brightly colored, low carb vegetables daily!”

Then I wait for their eyebrows to go up...

I Need How Many Vegetables a Day?!?

Nutrition scientists and researchers have an ongoing debate about how much fat, carbs and protein a person needs but one of the few subjects that brings peace talks around the proverbial academic table is the nutrition message of eating more vegetables. There has been one change to the eat your vegetables message, however – the daily recommendation has increased. **The Institute for Functional Medicine advises 8 – 10 servings of low carb vegetables daily from all colors of the rainbow.**

Vegetables, as well as fruits, contain powerful nutrients and phytonutrients that are not supplied by any other food groups. Each color group in the vegetable and fruit kingdoms provide different nutrients – vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients and amino acids – that keep our bodies’ metabolic pathways functioning properly. If you’ve ever taken a biochemistry or cell biology class this may sound familiar.

Without the key nutrients supplied by vegetables, we are more susceptible to diseases and conditions that could otherwise be prevented – like certain cancers, autoimmune conditions, and diseases of the eyes, heart and brain. And, when these nutrients and phytonutrients are supplied regularly in our diets, our metabolic pathways hum like a hummingbird which equates to a healthy immune system, improved energy and less sickness.

So, how in the heck can you eat 8 – 10 servings of vegetables in 1 day?

First, it’s important to keep in mind what a serving is:

One Serving Equals: ½ cup cooked or raw low carb, chopped veggies OR 1 cup of raw, leafy veggies

Here's a tour of what a day with 8 – 10 servings of vegetables looks like:

- **Breakfast (pick one):**
 - [Egg Muffins](#) or veggie omelet with ½ – 1 cup vegetables **(1 – 2 servings veggies)**
 - [Green Smoothie](#) made with 1 cup raw spinach and fruit **(1 serving veggies)**
- **Lunch (pick one):**
 - Salad made with 2 cups greens and 1 cup chopped veggies (Be sure to add protein and healthy fat) **(4 servings veggies)**
 - Bunless Burger with roasted red pepper, lettuce, tomato and grilled asparagus (Avocado is the healthy fat) **(3 servings veggies)**
- **Dinner (pick one):**
 - 1 cup patty pan squash with onions and 1 cup roasted Brussels sprouts **(4 servings veggies)**
 - 1 cup lemon dill green beans and 1 cup roasted zucchini & squash **(4 servings veggies)**

Here are 5 tips for how to make this happen:

Tip #1: Pre-prep on Sundays

Over the weekend, buy the vegetables you will need for the following week and chop them on Sunday afternoon. Store chopped vegetables in glass containers or plastic ziptop bags like books on a bookshelf.

Tip #2: Invest in chopping gadgets

- If pre-prepping produce is as dreaded as a root canal, invest in a couple of handy chopping tools and schedule a group chopping time. Put on some good music and knock it out in an hour while enjoying some quality chat time with your family or roommates.
- Or, find a responsible teen in your neighborhood that aspires to be a chef. Hire them once a week to do your chopping for you (this teen may live in your house). Thanks to the Food Network, many teens LOVE being in the kitchen. I would've chosen chopping produce over babysitting any day! (This could look good on a culinary school or college application!)
- Check out these quick chopping tutorials:
 - [How to Dice Onions](#)
 - [How to Dice Bell Peppers](#)
 - [How to Dice Celery](#)
 - [How to Use a Mandoline](#)

Tip #3: Consider “Batch” cooking

Consider “Batch” cooking. Batch cooking is cooking large servings of foods on weekends that can be used for dinners during the week. Here are some examples of batch cooking:

- **Vegetables** – Roast several large pans of various vegetables to use for dinners and in salads throughout the week.
- **Meats** – Grill or bake 8 – 10 chicken breasts, crock pot 2 pork tenderloins and grill several pounds of shrimp for weeknight meals. Freeze in individual meal portions and leave out enough for a few meals during the week. Add raw or grilled veggies and a healthy starch for a quick dinner.
- **Beans and Lentils** – Cook a large batch of lentils and toss dry beans in the crockpot overnight. Freeze in individual zip top bags. These are good for quick prep of bean and veggie dishes during the week.
- **Soups and Sauces** – Make spaghetti sauce (with lots of veggies) and soups (with lots of veggies) in large batches. Freeze one batch and save the other for dinner one night this week. Add a side salad.
- **Starches** – Bake a large batch of sweet potatoes, cool, then wrap them in wax paper and freeze in zip top bags. Thaw what’s needed for dinner in the microwave. You can serve your veggies and meat right on top of them.

Cook a large batch of brown or wild rice, quinoa or millet. Freeze them in family size portions and add to veggie stir fries, soups or as a side dish.

- **Vegetable Frittatas or Egg Muffins** – cooked eggs freeze well. Take advantage of this opportunity by making batches of **Egg Muffins** or **Vegetable Frittatas** on the weekends. Cut in individual portions, freeze and thaw when needed for a quick breakfast with veggies on the go.

For more tips on Batch cooking, check out [this Washington Post article](#).

Tip #4: Make a “To Go Stir Fry Kit”

By Thursday, your Sunday pre-prep ingredients may run out. So, consider stopping by the salad bar at your work cafeteria or at your local supermarket. Stuff a few take out containers with chopped broccoli, onions, carrots, peppers and mushrooms.

Once home, toss the veggies in a skillet with extra virgin olive oil. Add chicken or shrimp and your pre-cooked quinoa or wild rice and you’ll have dinner in 15 minutes.

Tip #5: Re-create your plate in restaurants

When eating in a restaurant, split an entrée with someone at the table or choose a healthy appetizer-sized protein (ex. grilled shrimp) and add 2 side vegetables or 1 side vegetable and a salad. If desired, add a starch like wild rice or a sweet potato.

Most entrees aren't served this way but restaurants are very accommodating and can easily make this happen. (Hint: This is a lot easier to do if you choose a restaurant that offers vegetables. For instance, this will be a challenge at a barbecue lodge, fried seafood house or fast food restaurant.)

With a little practice and planning plus some new kitchen skills, you will be up to 8 – 10 servings of vegetables daily in no time!

Note: Those with IBS may need the assistance of a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist to help determine how to increase vegetables without causing GI distress.

What strategies do you use to add more vegetables to your eating plan?