

## Eat the rainbow! Bringing color, nutrition to your plate

By Julia Haskins

**B**oring food got you down? Looking for a way to eat more nutritiously? You can accomplish both these goals by eating the rainbow — it's not as strange as you might think. Meals and snacks can be made much healthier and tastier by using vegetables and fruits that match the colors of the rainbow. From sweet red cherries to savory purple eggplants and

everything in between, there's no shortage of produce that will give your food a burst of color and flavor.

Putting more color in your diet comes with many health benefits. For one, vegetables and fruits are loaded with vitamins and minerals to keep you healthy and prevent some diseases. Eating with the rainbow in mind will also help you eat plenty of vegetables and fruits each day. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that adults eat at least two to three cups of vegetables and one-and-a-half to two cups of fruit on a daily basis. It's easy to get enough servings of vegetables and fruits when you can choose from beets, carrots, squash, collard greens, blueberries and purple cabbage, just to name a few. And you don't have to eat all that produce in just one meal. Using a bunch of vegetables and fruits is also a great way to prep your meals throughout the week, saving you time and money.

"Planning and making smarter choices in your meal decisions is the way to make less healthy dishes more nutritious," says Jo Ann Carson, PhD, past chair of the Nutrition

Committee of the American Heart Association and faculty member at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center.

When grocery shopping, consider buying some produce that you've never eaten before. Grab something that looks interesting, like a yellow star fruit to slice up for an afternoon snack. For a tasty side dish, try romanesco, a vegetable that tastes similar to cauliflower and looks like little bunches of trees. Don't be afraid to try something new. You may even find a recipe that you and your family will love by experimenting with different produce.

This is your chance to get creative in the kitchen, so have fun with it! If you don't know where to begin, the American Heart Association offers simple recipes with lots of colorful fruits and vegetables. You can make "nachos" using apple slices as a base for honey, peanut butter and crunchy toppings like sunflower seeds. For an easy dinner to satisfy even picky eaters, whip up some chicken served in pita and topped with generous amounts of tomato, cucumber and lettuce.

To get more colors of the rainbow on your plate, salads are always a smart choice, as are soups and stir-frys. These dishes make it easy to throw in whatever produce you like, often without a recipe. Peppers, cabbage and greens of all kinds make perfect additions to a savory dish you're creating on the fly. Add in a mix of spices for even more color and flavor.

### Make friends with frozen foods

When creating your grocery shopping list, remember to check out all the sections besides the produce aisle to get your fill of the rainbow.

"Think beyond the produce aisle," Carson says. "Dried, canned or frozen fruits and vegetables are excellent ways to work around produce expiration dates."

She recommends canned vegetables and fruits to keep in the pantry so that you always have healthy food on hand.



>> For more ideas on using colorful produce in your meals, visit [www.heart.org/recipes](http://www.heart.org/recipes)

Plus, you don't have to worry about using food right away. You'll have the makings of a healthy meal whenever you need it.

"Since they don't expire quickly, you won't waste money when buying canned veggies — which sometimes happens with fresh produce that goes bad," Carson says.

Cooking with frozen produce is also helpful if you want to eat the rainbow on a regular basis. Carson notes that frozen vegetables and fruits are picked at the peak of ripeness before being flash frozen, locking in nutrition. They're also affordable and can be stored in the freezer for several months, she says. Just make sure to read the labels on packaging for sodium and added sugars.

### Creative ways to enjoy the rainbow

You can also think about ways to use produce as a substitute for other ingredients to get more color into your diet, as the American Heart Association suggests. Grate beets and carrots into bread or muffin mixtures. Using these vegetables makes for a sweet treat that could be eaten as a dessert. Swap wheat or rice noodles for "zoodles," spirals of zucchini that can be topped with any number of sauces that you would put on regular pasta. You can even "sip the rainbow" with a vegetable and fruit smoothie that's perfect for a healthy on-the-go snack.

Blueberries, raspberries and even kale taste great blended together. Your smoothie may not look as pretty as it would with all the vegetables and fruits arranged on a plate, but it's sure to be tasty.



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