

# FOCUS ON FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

## Introduction

This lesson gives an older adult audience the opportunity to share strategies for including more fruits and vegetables in their diets. Depending on participants' interests, instructors can shift the balance in this lesson between understanding dietary goals for fruit and vegetable consumption and sharing more practical tips on buying, storing, and preparing fruits and vegetables.

## Preparation

### 1. Review the topic.

- Start with the key concepts and discussion guide. The discussion guide provides suggested questions to draw out participants' existing knowledge as well as information you can offer in response to each question.
- Consider your participant demographics and potential interests, and conduct any additional research that may be necessary to prepare for specific questions or improve your own understanding of key concepts (see "Program Guide" for suggested resources).

### 2. Plan your lesson structure.

- Determine whether time and resources allow for a food-based activity or whether you will use an alternate activity. This lesson includes one alternate activity, and additional activity suggestions are available in the "Program Guide."
- See "Exercise for Health" lesson for ways to incorporate physical activity into the lesson, and plan to ask participants to share their favorite ways to exercise.
- Prepare a rough timeline of your lesson and a plan to integrate discussion with the activity. Depending on available time and participant interests, you can integrate discussion topics into an activity or use discussion time to open or close the lesson.

**3. Plan how to administer pre-test** (as well as post-test if this is the final session). See "Program Guide" for details.

### 4. Prepare materials.

- Review the appropriate activity and prepare any necessary materials.
- Choose and print handouts, recipes and pre-tests.

## Suggested Recipes

*Recipes provided with this lesson should either include a variety of vegetables and/or fruits or provide ideas for making individual vegetables more interesting, ideally some dark green or orange vegetables.*

- Glazed Carrots with Pecans
- Roasted Seasonal Vegetables

## Suggested Handouts

- "Vary Your Fruits and Vegetables"

## Key Concepts

Vitamins, minerals and other substances found in fruits and vegetables help maintain healthy functioning bodies and prevent disease. Older adults should fill up half their plate with fruits and vegetables at each meal. Experimenting with different types of fruits and vegetables and various cooking/preparation methods can help people find their favorites to incorporate into their regular diet.



## Discussion Guide

*What are your favorite fruits and vegetables? What are some of the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables?*

- Fruits and vegetables are naturally low in fat, sodium and calories, and are full of important vitamins and minerals. They are also full of fiber, which helps you feel full, supports healthy bowel function and helps reduce blood cholesterol levels. (See “Program Guide” for specific benefits of different vitamins and minerals.)

*How do you know if you’re eating enough fruits and vegetables?*

- A simple way to meet your daily fruit and vegetable needs is to use the MyPlate method: fill half your plate with vegetables at lunch and dinner, and add a piece of fruit to breakfast and as a snack.
- Men and women 51 and older need 2-2.5 cups of vegetables per day. A cup of cut or cooked vegetables or two cups of leafy greens counts as one cup of vegetables.
- Men and women 51 and older need 1.5-2 cups of fruit per day. A large banana or orange, a small apple, and ½ cup of dried fruit count as one cup of fruit (cut up, or 100% fruit juice).
- Example serving sizes:



1 cup carrots = 1 cup vegetables



1/2 cup beans =  
1/2 cup vegetables



1 cup spinach = 1/2 cup vegetables



1/2 cup tomatoes =  
1/2 cup vegetables



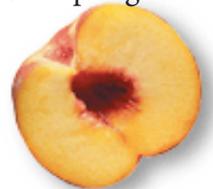
1 small apple =  
1 cup fruit



1/4 cup raisins = 1/2 cup fruit



1 bunch grapes = 1.5 cups fruit



1/2 peach =  
1/2 cup fruit

Images from the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion’s ChooseMyPlate.gov website

*What are some strategies for eating more fruits and vegetables?*

- Add vegetables to your favorite pasta dish—mix into any sauce, or layer greens, mushrooms, broccoli or eggplant between lasagna noodles.
- Top regular or sweet potatoes with broccoli and cheese, chili or another soup.
- Roll raw or shredded vegetables (try carrots, red and green peppers, broccoli, and greens) in a tortilla with hummus.
- For a quick and delicious snacks roll your favorite fruits (try banana or apple slices) in a tortilla with peanut butter.
- Make smoothies with your favorite fruits, yogurt and lowfat milk. Try adding greens like spinach if you’re feeling adventurous!
- Keep a bowl of whole fruit on the table or counter.
- Cut up fruits and vegetables in the morning and store in a container in your fridge for easy snacking during the day. A splash of lemon or lime juice will keep cut fruits from browning.



### ***What keeps you from eating fruits and vegetables? What are some tips for making fruits and vegetables easier to prepare and eat?***

- Canned and frozen fruits and vegetables are often pre-cut and have similar prices to whole fresh vegetables. Although pre-cut fresh fruits and vegetables are sometimes more expensive, they may be worth the price if they help you avoid cutting and chopping or potentially wasting fresh produce.
- Salad bars in grocery stores often have pre-cut fruits and vegetables that you can purchase in small quantities (although this may not always be the most cost-effective option). Mixed greens can be cheaper in salad bars than boxed or bagged in the produce section because they are so lightweight.
- Keep produce from spoiling before you have a chance to eat it by looking for fruits and vegetables without scars or bruises and storing fruits and vegetables separately once you get home. If you aren't able to go shopping once a week, you can buy more frozen and canned produce that won't spoil if kept properly.
- Bake apples and pears in the oven to make them softer and sweeter.
- Individual applesauce cups without added sugar are an easy way to get one serving of fruit.
- Cooking vegetables in casseroles or enjoying low-sodium vegetable or bean soups are easy ways to add in more vegetables that are easy to chew.
- Canned fruits and vegetables that don't have extra sugar or salt added tend to be softer than fresh produce—try carrots, peaches and green beans. Canned fruits and vegetables can also be enjoyed when fresh produce is not in season.
- Certain fruits and vegetables are naturally softer than others. Bananas, tomatoes and cooked beans, peas and sweet potatoes are all examples.

### ***Why are the nutrients found in fruits and vegetables important?***

Here are some examples:

- Potassium helps maintain blood pressure; it can be found in potatoes, white beans, bananas, orange juice and melons.
- Fiber helps us feel full, helps reduce blood cholesterol, maintains normal bowel function, and may reduce risk of heart disease. Whole or cut fruits and vegetables are all great sources of fiber; fruit juices have hardly any fiber.
- Vitamin C assists with the growth and repair of tissues in our body; it helps heal cuts and wounds and keeps gums and teeth healthy. It can be found in oranges, strawberries, kiwis and tomatoes.
- Folate helps form red blood cells; dark green vegetables and legumes like beans and lentils are good sources of folate.
- Vitamin A keeps our skin and eyes healthy and protects against infections; it can be found in carrots, sweet potatoes, and other orange foods.

### ***Are there different categories of vegetables?***

- The USDA uses five different categories of vegetables: dark green (collards, broccoli, kale), red/orange (sweet potatoes, tomatoes, carrots), starchy (corn, potatoes, green peas), beans and legumes (black beans, lentils), and other (eggplant, beets, green peppers, etc.) Ideally you should be eating a mix of vegetables from these different groups, and people with diabetes need to be especially careful about starchy vegetables (like potatoes and squash)—you might count these as grains and fill ½ of your plate with other types of vegetables.



## Suggested Activities

If you have access to basic ingredients and supplies, we recommend planning the lesson around a cooking demonstration or activity that will show participants concrete skills that apply the lesson concepts. If limited resources or time make a food-based activity impossible, use the alternate activity or any of the other suggested activities in the “Program Guide.”

### A. Food-Based Activity: Sweet and Savory Salads

*Salads can include both vegetables and fruits, and even people who think they don't like salad may find quick and easy combinations they love. These no-cook examples involve minimal cutting and provide a great way to get a variety of different nutrients by building on a base of leafy greens and adding colorful fruits and vegetables.*

**Discussion points** to address while preparing food (see discussion guide as well):

- What types of greens do you like to use in salads? Darker-colored greens are particularly full of nutrients; does anyone like spinach, arugula, kale or chard? Collard greens are another great dark green but usually too tough for salads.
- What vegetables and fruits you like to add to salads? Fresh, frozen, dried and canned varieties are all nutritious options (but watch out for added sugar and salt in dried and canned produce), and pre-cut fresh fruits and vegetables are often available in the produce section or salad bars if you want to avoid cutting. Frozen (defrosted) berries and canned beets are common non-fresh salad additions.
- Try to think of great salads you've had at restaurants or friends' houses. What other toppings can you add to salads to make them extra delicious? Canned beans or tuna are easy and affordable protein additions.
- Has anyone ever made their own dressing? Making your own dressing gives you ultimate control over the flavor and ingredients, so you can cut down on fat by using healthier plant-based oils and add flavors you prefer.

<b>Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mixing bowl(s): one for demo, or one per group</li> <li>• Large spoon(s): one for demo, or one per group</li> <li>• Jars or small bowls and forks for mixing dressing</li> <li>• Sample dishes and spoons for each participant</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start by deciding whether the activity will be a demonstration or will involve participation. If participants will be preparing food themselves, decide whether they will work alone or in groups.</li> <li>• Review “Program Guide” for tips on leading a cooking demo or guiding participants through a recipe.</li> <li>• Review ingredients and make substitutions as necessary.</li> <li>• Modify recipe as necessary, and print copies for participants to take home.</li> <li>• Tear greens and cut vegetables unless you have space and equipment to let participants do prep work.</li> </ul>
<b>Ingredients</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salad greens: lettuce, arugula, kale or chard</li> <li>• Vegetables and fruits: fresh grapes, berries and cherry tomatoes don't require any cutting; cut fruits like apples or peaches, or vegetables like sweet peppers, radishes, tomatoes, or pea pods into bite-size pieces; try adding raisins, dried apricot, dried or frozen (defrosted) berries or canned beets.</li> <li>• Assorted toppings: try feta, goat cheese, almonds, walnuts, or pecans.</li> </ul>
<b>Directions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combine greens, vegetables/fruits, and toppings in a bowl (or invite participants to do the same.)</li> <li>• Using recipe handout, add basic dressing ingredients to a jar and shake (or invite participants to do the same). Add dressing to salad and toss to combine.</li> </ul>

### B. Alternate Activity: Healthier Favorites

<b>Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optional paper and pens or pencils</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brainstorm example meals and ideas for adding fruits and vegetables</li> </ul>
<b>Activity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask everyone to think of some of their favorite meals.</li> <li>• Invite volunteers to share, and ask for some examples of favorite meals without many fruits or vegetables (examples: fried chicken and mashed potatoes, spaghetti with red sauce, hamburgers).</li> <li>• Ask for suggestions of how fruits and vegetables could be incorporated into those meals. You can also invite participants to share their favorite recipes and ways to prepare fruits and vegetables.</li> </ul>

# Sweet and Savory Salads

Salads can include both vegetables and fruits, and even people who think they don't like salad may find quick and easy combinations they love. These no-cook examples involve minimal cutting and provide a great way to get a variety of different nutrients by building on a base of leafy greens and adding colorful fruits and vegetables.

## INGREDIENTS

- Vegetables and fruits:
  - Fresh grapes, berries and cherry tomatoes don't require any cutting
  - Cut fruits like apples or peaches, or vegetables like sweet peppers, radishes, tomatoes, or pea pods into bite-size pieces
  - Try adding raisins, dried apricot, dried or frozen (defrosted) berries or canned beets
- Salad greens: lettuce, arugula, kale or chard
- Assorted toppings: try feta, goat cheese, almonds, walnuts, or pecans.
- Choose a dressing (below)

### Classic Vinaigrette:

- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 2 teaspoons dijon mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- Pepper to taste
- 1/3 to 1/2 cup olive oil

### Maple Balsamic Vinaigrette:

- 1.5 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 2 teaspoons maple syrup
- 2 teaspoons Dijon or stone ground mustard
- Salt & pepper (to taste)

### Shallot-White Wine:

- Make Classic Vinaigrette, replacing the red wine vinegar with white wine vinegar
- Add 1 minced shallot

### Lemon Balsamic:

- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons dijon mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- Pepper to taste
- 1/2 cup olive oil

### Jam Dressing:

- 1.5 tablespoons jam
- 1.5 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- Lemon juice (to taste)

## DIRECTIONS

1. Combine greens, vegetables/fruits and toppings in a bowl.
2. Add basic dressing ingredients to a jar and shake, or mix in a bowl using a fork.
3. Add dressing to salad and toss to combine.