



# Aging Healthfully Newsletter

Illinois Department on Aging

## Food as Medicine

**It was about 2,500 years ago that Hippocrates said the phrase “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.”**

According to much of the research we have today on lifestyle and diet, it is estimated that close to 80% of diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and depression can be linked to our lifestyle and food choices.

This popular quote should not be misinterpreted to mean that conventional medicine such as insulin to treat diabetes or medications that lower blood pressure are not necessary and beneficial.

**Instead this should provide hope that you have options as well as the ability to impact your health in a positive way through the foods you routinely eat!**

## The Antioxidants Found in Fruits and Vegetables Combat Disease

**What are antioxidants?**

≈ *Antioxidants* are substances that stabilize *free radicals*.

≈ *Free radicals* are chemicals produced by pollution, UV light, radiation, and toxic substances and cause damage to cells in the body, which can lead to disease.

**Antioxidants are found in a wide variety of fruits and vegetables and may help prevent and reduce risk for diseases like cancer, heart disease, UTIs, Alzheimer’s disease, type II diabetes, cataracts, arthritis and many more.**

### Inflammation & Disease Fighting Fruits & Vegetables:

- Red – tomatoes, watermelon, red bell pepper, cranberries, strawberries
- Orange/yellow – sweet potatoes, carrots, pumpkin, nectarines
- Green – spinach, kale, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, cabbage
- Blue/purple – blueberries, plums, eggplant, grapes
- White – onions, cauliflower, garlic, white pears and peaches





## Ways to Incorporate More Antioxidants into Meals

### ☉ Breakfast/Breakfast for Lunch or Dinner:

- **Avocado Tomato & Egg Toast** – Mash a ripe avocado and spread on top of whole wheat toast. Add fully cooked scrambled eggs or a poached egg on top of the mashed avocado and top with fresh slices of tomatoes.
- **Veggie-Loaded Breakfast Burrito** – Cook diced onions, garlic, mushrooms, zucchini and spinach then combine with scrambled eggs and cheese. Add veggie and egg mixture to a whole wheat tortilla and serve with salsa.
- **Fresh Berry Fruit Compote** - Puree or mash fresh, washed, ripe blueberries, strawberries, or raspberries. Cook berries with lemon juice and a touch of honey or brown sugar until slightly thickened for a healthier alternative to maple syrup on pancakes and waffles.

### ☉ Lunch:

- **Roasted Balsamic Brussels Sprouts** – Place fresh, rinsed Brussels sprouts with ends cut off and halved (or frozen, thawed and drained of excess water) on a baking sheet. Whisk olive oil, balsamic vinegar, black pepper and lemon juice together and drizzle over Brussels sprouts. Roast at 400 degrees for 20-25 minutes or until fork tender.
- **Southwest Chicken Salad** – Top your spinach salad greens with drained, canned no-salt-added corn, rinsed/drained black beans, fresh chopped tomatoes, sliced avocado, diced red onion, diced red bell pepper, cheddar cheese, grilled chicken or fish with an oil and vinegar-based dressing or salsa ranch.
- **Spinach & Cranberry Sweet Potato Bake** – Roast peeled, diced sweet potatoes mixed with fresh chopped spinach, olive oil, chopped walnuts and a handful of reduced sugar dried cranberries. Top with parmesan cheese just before serving.

### ☉ Beverages/Desserts:

- **Watermelon Slush** – Freeze small cubes of watermelon and once frozen add to a blender with fresh lime juice, club soda or your favorite flavored water for a refreshing summer drink!
- **Caramelized Stone Fruit** – Wash, slice, or halve and remove the pits from one type of stone fruit or a combination of plums, peaches, nectarines, and apricots. Place them cut side up in an oven-safe baking dish. Mix and combine honey, cinnamon, a splash of 100% orange juice and a drizzle of canola oil or melted butter. Drizzle the honey mixture over the top and roast at 400 degrees for ~20 minutes. You can also try grilling them as well.
- **Frozen Grapes with Dark Chocolate** – Rinse seedless grapes and pat dry. Place in the freezer until ready to eat and drizzle with melted dark chocolate for a healthy “sorbet-like” dessert.



## **What counts as a 1/2 cup equivalent of vegetables?**

- ½ cup cooked, drained, fresh, frozen, canned or raw vegetable
  - Examples: ½ cup cooked, canned corn; ½ cup raw or cooked broccoli
- ½ cup 100% vegetable or tomato juice (preferably low sodium)
- 1 cup raw leafy greens
  - Examples: 1 cup raw spinach; 1 cup mixed greens; 1 cup romaine

**Note:** lettuce and tomato served as a garnish on a sandwich is considered a condiment and should not be counted as a serving of vegetables.

## **2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans – Five Vegetable Subgroups:**

1. **Dark-Green Vegetables** – broccoli, spinach, romaine, collards, bok choy, kale, turnip greens, mustard greens, parsley, cilantro
2. **Red & Orange Vegetables** – tomatoes, carrots, tomato juice (low sodium preferably), sweet potatoes, red peppers, pumpkin, acorn squash, butternut squash, delicate squash, spaghetti squash
3. **Legumes (beans and peas)** – pinto beans, white beans, kidney beans, black beans, lentils, chickpeas, lima beans (mature, dried), split peas, edamame (green soybeans)
4. **Starchy Vegetables** – potatoes, corn, green peas, lima (green, immature), plantains, cassava
5. **Other Vegetables** – iceberg lettuce, onions, garlic, green beans, cabbage, mushrooms, cauliflower, asparagus, beets, avocado, green peppers, zucchini, eggplant, cucumbers, celery, olives, peapods (snow peas)

**Consuming vegetables from all five subgroups on a weekly basis can help ensure you are getting a variety of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants!**

### **Attachments:**

- Fight Aging with Food
- Produce Chart Fruits
- Produce Chart Veggies
- Leafy Greens - Inflammation Fighters
- What Color Are Your Fruits and Vegetables
- Vegetable Subgroups Matching Activity
- July Recipes: Blueberry Chicken Salad; Chipotle-Lime Three Bean Salad

### **References:**

<https://fruitsandveggies.org/stories/what-are-phytochemicals/>  
<https://pbhfoundation.org/about/res/pic/phytolist/resveratrol.php>  
[https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/?\\_ga=2.226990110.2013254691.1561382634-1184852664.1561382634](https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/?_ga=2.226990110.2013254691.1561382634-1184852664.1561382634)  
<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/antioxidants/introduction.htm>

**Illinois Department on Aging  
One Natural Resources Way, Suite 100  
Springfield, IL 62702**