

Is Your Diet Colorful Enough?

Eating your greens every day used to be enough. Now the government is urging Americans to eat their reds, white, blues, and yellows, too.

That advice stems from studies showing that different-colored produce contains different phytochemicals, including antioxidants and other disease-fighting substances. Ideally, says the National Cancer Institute, people should eat at least one item of each color daily. But the practical message is to spread your choices among all five groups over time.

The table below lists the possible benefit of the phytochemicals in fruits and vegetables of different colors. The evidence ranges from moderately strong observational data in humans, for phytochemicals such as lycopene, beta-carotene, and lutein, to predominantly animal or laboratory research on substances such as anthocyanins and indoles.

For additional information, go to www.5aday.gov or consult these books: “The Color Code,” by James A. Joseph, Ph.D., Daniel A. Nadeau, M.D., and Anne Underwood; and “What Color Is Your Diet?,” by David Heber, M.D., Ph.D.

<u>Fruit or Vegetable</u>	<u>Phytochemical</u>	<u>Possible Benefits</u>
Guava, pink grapefruit, tomatoes, watermelon	Lycopene	Reduced prostate cancer risk
Beets, cranberries, kidney beans, raspberries, red apples, red cabbage, red onions, strawberries, sweet cherries	Anthocyanins*	Lowered blood pressure, protection against circulatory problems caused by diabetes
Garlic, leeks, white onions	Allicin	Reduced risk of cancer spread and heart attack; lowered cholesterol and blood pressure; enhanced infection defenses
Blackberries, black currants, blueberries, elderberries, purple grapes	Anthocyanins	Reduced risk of cancer, heart disease, and age-related memory loss
Eggplant, plums, prunes, raisins	Phenolics	Slowing of some effects of aging
Apricots, butternut squash, cantaloupe, carrots, mangos, peaches, pumpkin, sweet potatoes	Beta-carotene	Reduced risk of cancer and heart disease; maintenance of good vision; increased infection-fighting ability

Apricots, clementines, grapefruit, lemons, nectarines, oranges, papaya, peaches, pears, pineapple, tangerines, yellow peppers, yellow raisins	Bioflavonoids	Together with the vitamin C in these fruits, reduced cancer and heart-attack risk; maintenance of healthy skin, bones, and teeth
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Broccoli, green peas, honeydew melon, kale, kiwifruit, leafy greens, romaine lettuce, spinach	Lutein	Maintenance of good vision; reduced risk of macular degeneration and cataracts
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Arugala, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, rutabaga, Swiss chard, turnips, watercress	Indoles	Reduced risk of breast and prostate cancer
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*Research has found different possible benefits for anthocyanins, depending on whether red or blue-purple produce was studied.

Reference Source: Consumer Reports "On Health", September 2002, Vol. 14, No. 9
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