

Food is



By Akinwale Akingbule, Extension Educator

Food is Medicine: Focus on Fruits and Vegetables

Isn't it amazing that every season has fruits and vegetables that thrive and are available? Fruits and vegetables come in different shapes, sizes, colors and tastes. If you are not familiar with the benefits of eating them, you may have been eating them only when you feel like it. Do not wait till then, to eat one. It is important to make fruits and vegetables part of your daily menu. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends that you make half of your plate fruits and vegetables. Today, we shall discuss some amazing facts about fruits and vegetables, some benefits of eating them and how you can develop the habit of eating more fruits and vegetables.

Dietary modification remains one of the main management strategies for diet related chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and obesity related diseases. A common recommendation in modifying your diet is to consume more fruits and vegetables. At times, this sounds like bad news especially to a person that has not developed a lifelong habit of eating fruits and vegetables. However, If we understand the different ways we can consume fruits and vegetables, and enjoy them, we can live a healthier life and prevent or better manage, many diet related chronic diseases.

Amazing facts about fruits and vegetables:

- They are naturally low in fat, sodium, cholesterol and calories.
- They are sources of many essential nutrients such as potassium, Vitamin A & C, Folate, and more.
- Fruits usually require no refrigeration.
- They are rich in fibers.
- All fruit is good fruit.

Benefits of eating fruits and vegetables

1. Consumption of fruits and vegetables have been found to reduce the risk of several chronic diseases including stroke, cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.
2. They are nutrient dense and contain few calories. Eating fruits and vegetables in place of less nutritious and calorie dense diet can be a way to control your calories. They help you to feel full with fewer calories, thereby helping in weight control.
3. Fruits and vegetables are vitamin packed, and ensure healthy body cells and tissues.
4. They contain anti-oxidants that prevent diseases and help to prevent or reduce aging.

Tips to maximize the benefits of fruits and vegetables

- Choose varieties of fruits and vegetables with different colors because they provide you variety of nutrients
- Make half of your plate fruits and vegetables
- Use nutrition fact labels when buying canned, dried or frozen fruits and vegetables. Pay attention to the percent Daily Value (%DV) of how much vitamin A and C and Dietary fiber is present. 5% DV is low and 20% DV or more is high. The more, the better.
- When choosing canned fruits and vegetables, choose ones with low added sugar and low sodium.
- Eat fruits and vegetables; fresh, frozen, canned or dried.
- Eat more fruits as snacks, in salads, as side dishes and as deserts.
- Make smoothies using frozen fruit.
- Place nuts and dried fruits in your desk drawer for easy access.

Fruits are naturally sweet and can be eaten in different forms such as fresh whole fruits, diced, sliced or made into juice. Vegetables can also be eaten in different forms. They can be eaten as main menu, sides, and snacks or as major ingredients of soups. There are many different types. Eat the varieties and enjoy their benefits. So, why wait for a need to modify your diet because of health issue? Eat more fruits and vegetables today and always. Health is wealth.