

Americans Eating Fewer Vegetables

5 a Day for Fruits and Vegetables? No Way, Surveys Show

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March 19, 2007 -- A new report shows Americans are actually getting worse at eating their vegetables.

This is hardly the first study to document dismal diet habits. Last week, the CDC gave U.S. adults poor marks for fruit and vegetable consumption.

Now, researchers from Johns Hopkins University confirm that Americans aren't getting better at eating fruits and vegetables -- even though public health officials urge them to do so.

The Johns Hopkins study shows that, among U.S. adults, fruit consumption is holding steady, but vegetable consumption is headed down -- even if you count french fries.

The study appears in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

Fruit, Vegetable Consumption

Johns Hopkins University's Tiffany Gary, PhD, and colleagues reviewed data from two national health surveys.

The first survey, conducted from 1988 to 1994, included nearly 15,000 U.S. adults. The second survey, done between 1999 and 2002, included about 8,900 U.S. adults.

In both, participants reported everything they had eaten during the previous 24 hours. Then researchers checked how many people met these goals:

- Two or more servings of fruit, including fresh fruit, dried fruit, and 100% fruit juice
- Three or more servings of vegetables (fried potatoes count).

These goals have been touted since 1991 as part of the national campaign to get Americans to eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day. But apparently, most people aren't heeding the message.

Few Met Goals

In the earlier survey, 27% of participants met the fruit consumption goal vs. 28% in the later survey.

But the percentage meeting the vegetable consumption goal fell from 35% in the earlier survey to 32% in the one started about a decade later.

Fruit consumption basically stayed the same while vegetable consumption dropped slightly, note the researchers.

In addition, vegetable eaters appear to be in a bit of a rut. They tended to eat several servings of the same vegetable, showing little dietary diversity.

In each survey, only 11% met both goals.

Whites, college graduates, older adults, and people with higher incomes were more likely to meet the goals for fruit and vegetable consumption.

New Campaign

Today, the nonprofit Produce for Better Health Foundation launched a national effort to promote fruit and vegetable consumption.

The campaign, called "Fruits & Veggies -- More Matters," encourages Americans to eat more fruits and vegetables.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) gives these tips to help you meet your fruit and vegetable goals:

- Keep a bowl of fruit handy.
- Go for variety.
- Serve a salad with dinner.
- Add beans to chili or soup.
- If you're ordering pizza, add some veggie toppings.
- Put chopped vegetables in pasta sauce or lasagna.
- Dip fresh fruit in low-fat yogurt or pudding.
- Dip raw veggies in low-fat salad dressing.

Helping Kids Eat Fruits and Vegetables

It can be a challenge to get kids to eat fruits and vegetables, according to a survey of 1,000 U.S. moms conducted as part of the "Fruits & Veggies -- More Matters" campaign.

In the survey, more than 70% of moms gave their children grades of "A" or "B" for eating fruits and vegetables. But nearly 30% gave their kids and teens grades of "C" or lower for fruit and vegetable consumption.

Those mothers said their children were tempted by other foods and weren't interested in eating fruits and vegetables.

If that sounds like your family, here are solutions offered by the USDA:

- Set a good example with your own diet.

- While shopping, let kids pick a new fruit or vegetable to try.
- Kids often like foods served separately, so don't mix vegetables on their plate.
- Offer children a choice of fruits at lunch.
- Top kids' cereal with berries or a smiley face made of sliced bananas for eyes, raisins for a nose, and an orange slice for a mouth.
- Use cut-up vegetables as part of afternoon snacks.
- Let kids decide on the dinner vegetables or what goes into salads.
- If children are old enough, let them help shop for, clean, peel, or cut up fruits and vegetables.

Whether you have kids or not, pay attention to food safety.

Wash your hands before cooking or eating, and wash fruits and vegetables in clean, running water.

Keep fruits and vegetables separate from raw meat, poultry, and seafood, and heed the expiration dates on canned and frozen items.

SOURCES: Casagrande, S. *American Journal of Public Health*, April 2007; vol 32. News release, Produce for Better Health Foundation. U.S. Department of Agriculture: "Tips to Help You eat Fruits." Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide for Fruits & Veggies -- More Matters: "Gen X Moms Research -- Implications for Driving Fruit and Veggie Consumption." U.S. Department of Agriculture: "Tips to Help You Eat Vegetables."

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