

Nurses Notes on Nutrition

by Monica Petrella, JKES RN

On our tour of the Food Guide Pyramid, we are now approaching the **Fruits!** You can find out much more on www.mypyramid.gov or www.VirginiaGrown.com.

Fruits, like vegetables, are good sources of vitamin A and C, carbohydrates, and fiber. (See my prior “vegetables” nutrition notes). Fruits are an especially good source of vitamin C. It is recommended to eat **2 to 4 servings of fruit a day**, (at least one of which provides vitamin C) each equal in size to an orange. Vitamin C is needed to maintain bone, cartilage, teeth and skin.

[Like vegetables, fruits are a good source of phytochemicals (see “vegetables” nutrition notes) and **antioxidants**. Antioxidants (vitamin C, beta-carotene, vitamin E) are compounds that prevent oxygen from combining with other substances it might damage. Free radicals are an unstable form of oxygen produced in normal metabolism, and they can attack and damage proteins and lipids, especially in cell membranes and DNA. This damage is thought to contribute to conditions such as cancer, cataracts, cardiovascular disease, emphysema, Parkinson’s disease, Alzheimer’s disease, rheumatoid arthritis and premature aging. Our bodies can usually neutralize free radicals but if there is an abundance of them, antioxidants can help stop them and prevent damage. Antioxidants are found abundantly in fruits and vegetables. There is controversy on taking antioxidant supplements and the amount we need.] Soooooo to make a long story short, **eating your proper daily servings of fruits and vegetables is the healthiest thing to do!!**

Vitamin C has antioxidant effects and is in fruits such as oranges, kiwi, lemons, cantaloupe, cranberries, grapefruit, papaya, guava and acerola (raw). And don’t forget the fiber and other vitamins you get from bananas, pears, apples, and blackberries, to name a few.

For a snack, choose bite size fruits or vegetables instead of cookies or ice cream. Try sliced apples or bananas dipped in fruited yogurt or spread with peanut butter. I like “bumps (or ants) on a log.” Spread cream cheese or peanut butter on a celery stick topped with ants. Oh, I mean raisins!

Or try a “fruit shake” of blended milk with fresh or frozen fruit (berries, banana or peach). Or make a “parfait” made of layers of yogurt, fruit and granola.

Go nuts and be a peach! Balance your diet with fruits and veggies. It’s a berry good idea!!

(sources: health.howstuffworks.com – antioxidants; National Dairy Council; Teaching Today’s Health, 7th Ed., D. Anspaugh and G. Ezell 2004; Fitness and Wellness, 6th Ed., W. Hoeger and S. Hoeger, 2005; 2009 Virginia Grown Guide from the VA Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services)