

Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Time is ripe to eat more fruits, veggies

I was hoping I would begin to eat more fruits and vegetables during the summer, but I have to admit I haven't gotten into the habit yet. Any ideas to help get me started?

It's easy to get into a rut when it comes to what we eat day in and day out. If you're not accustomed to snacking on fruits and vegetables and including them in meals, you might feel — just as with any new habit — a bit stymied on how to start.

That could be why a new study found that only about 1 in 10 Americans eats enough produce. That's right — not only are you not alone in your produce-deficit diet, you're in the vast majority.

According to the study, conducted by researchers with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only 13 percent of Americans consumed the recommended 1.5-2 cups of fruit a day in 2013, and less than 9 percent consumed the recommended 2-3 cups of vegetables a day.

The report also provided a state-by-state analysis, and it showed Ohioans faring even worse, with only 11 percent eating enough fruit and 7 percent eating enough vegetables. If you're interested in the details, you can read more by searching for "State Indicator Report on Fruits and Vegetables" on www.cdc.gov. The results are disheartening, given that research shows over and over that eating plenty of produce provides protection against heart disease, diabetes, some types of cancer and other chronic illnesses.

An easy way to adopt eating new foods is to make them readily available. Buy some easy-to-consume produce such as baby carrots, apples, peaches, plums, bananas, or any "grab-and-go" fruit or vegetable, as well as bagged salads or microwaveable steam-in-the-bag frozen veggies



photo: iStock

that you enjoy eating. Store them in a place where you can easily see them to give yourself a visual reminder. Incorporate them into your dietary routine throughout the day: If you pack your lunch, include a piece of produce. If you normally grab a granola bar to eat on the way to work, take some grapes or berries instead.

Be sure to congratulate yourself at every step of the process: when you buy the produce, when you take it from the fridge, and when you eat it. Even a very simple internal "Good for you!" is helpful to ingrain a new healthy habit into your daily routine.

For fresh ideas, go to the "Fruit and Veggies: More Matters" website at www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org. Among its recommendations:

- Eat produce first. One study showed that serving produce first makes it more likely that people will put it on their plates than if it's served last.
- Incorporate fruits and vegetables into your regular dishes. Add grapes to chicken salad. Add a can of vegetables to your favorite soup.
- Build meals around fruits and vegetables instead of serving them on the side: Think stir fries, stuffed peppers and cauliflower casseroles.

The website offers plenty of other information, including recipes, lists of produce in season, and ideas to getting more fruits and vegetables. Check it out and get inspired.

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Editor: This column was reviewed by Irene Hatsu, Ohio State University Extension's food security specialist.

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