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STEPS TO A HEALTHIER YOU

Fact Sheet

Vary Your Vegetables *for Healthier School Meals*

KEY ISSUES:

- People who eat more vegetables as part of a healthy diet are likely to have a reduced risk of some chronic diseases.
- Most children and adults need to eat more dark green and orange vegetables, and dry beans and peas (legumes).
- Vegetables provide important nutrients, including vitamin A, vitamin C, potassium, folate, and dietary fiber.
- The *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend we eat 2 ½ cups of vegetables every day (based on a 2,000-calorie meal plan).
- Offer a wide variety of colorful, appealing vegetables every day.
- Start a farm-to-school program to obtain fresh produce locally. To get started, go to: www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Guidance

Want to add more color, crunch, and flavor to your menus? Offering a wide variety of vegetables provides a quick and easy way to make school meals pop with dazzling eye appeal and help students get the nutritional benefits they need. By eating more vegetables, students develop lifelong habits that promote good health!

Easy ways to follow the *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*

Recipe for Success

Go for variety!

- **Offer different veggies every day**, and include servings in each of these groups over a week:
  - Dark green: broccoli, spinach, romaine lettuce, and other dark leafy greens
  - Orange: acorn and butternut squash, carrots, sweet potatoes, and pumpkin
  - Dry beans and peas: black beans, black-eyed peas, garbanzo beans (chickpeas), kidney beans, lentils, navy beans, split peas, pinto beans, and white beans
  - Starchy: corn, green peas, green lima beans, and potatoes
  - Others: cauliflower, celery, cabbage, tomatoes, green beans, and iceberg lettuce

Boost the nutritional value!

- **Offer plenty of raw veggies** to get more dietary fiber.
- **Use herbs or no-salt spice mixes** instead of butter or hard margarine to season vegetable dishes to lower saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, and extra calories in vegetable dishes.
- **Buy canned vegetables labeled "no-salt added"** or choose lower sodium products.

Add more veggies to meals and snacks!

- **Prepare veggies in different ways:** fresh, cooked, as a side dish, or entree. For example, make a vegetable stir-fry or chicken Caesar salad.

USDA Commodity Food Program

You can stretch your food budget and insure high quality by ordering a wide variety of vegetables through USDA's Commodity Food Program and the Department of Defense. Check out the list of available foods at: www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/schcnp/ and www.dscp.dla.mil/subs/produce/index.asp.

- **Add shredded carrots or zucchini** into meatloaf, casseroles, quick breads, and muffins. Include chopped vegetables in pasta sauce or lasagna.
- **Serve seasonal veggies** like zucchini, squash, yams, and sweet potatoes.
- **Include cooked dry beans or peas** in flavorful mixed dishes. Add extra beans to casseroles or minestrone soup. Or, use white beans in your favorite chili recipe.
- **Offer garbanzo beans** or kidney beans on a salad bar.

Make vegetables more appealing!

- **Entice your students** with colorful and tasty fresh vegetables in small, easy-to-eat shapes: baby carrots or carrot sticks, green and red pepper slices, grape tomatoes, broccoli or cauliflower florets, and sliced zucchini and yellow squash.
- **Have taste tests and offer samples** to encourage students to try different vegetables.
- **Add color to lettuce mix** with carrot slices or strips, shredded red cabbage, or spinach leaves.
- **Serve low-fat dressing or dip** with raw veggies.

Did You Know?

It's important to wash all vegetables before cutting, preparing, or eating them. Under clean, running water, rub them briskly with your hands or a brush to remove dirt and surface microorganisms. Dry after washing.

Remember to keep vegetables separate from raw meat, poultry, and seafood while receiving, storing, or preparing them.

Messages for Students

- Eat a rainbow of colorful vegetables at lunch!
- Craving a crunchy snack? Grab raw veggies and low-fat dip for a delicious treat!
- Try a new veggie once a week—at home or at school.

For more information:

www.MyPyramid.gov

www.teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/fv_galore.html

http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/schoolmeals/Recipes/recipefinder.php

www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov/index.html

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