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## **Be good to your heart with fruits & veggies**

By

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[February is heart month](#) and there is no better reason to highlight the many ways our fruits and veggies fuel and maintain a healthy heart. Versatile veggies and fruit can be added to a variety of dishes or savored on their own to enhance a heart-healthy diet with fiber and essential nutrients. Make a habit of enjoying them with every meal and snack.

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## How do fruits and veggies enhance heart health? The answer is simple:

Many fruits and vegetables are rich in **soluble fiber**, which can lower LDL (“bad”) cholesterol. Soluble fiber may also reduce blood pressure and inflammation.

The red, orange, and yellow found in our colorful carrots, berries, beets and more aren’t just beautiful in a perfectly presented dish. This array of colors are **power-packed phytochemicals** that likely serve our body in a variety of ways including reducing inflammation and blood pressure, lowering cholesterol, and overall lessening the risk of heart disease.

Some phytochemicals are **antioxidants**, which are known to “attack” those harmful molecules in our body known as free radicals. Free radicals result naturally from metabolic processes or from toxins like air pollutants and cigarette smoke and cause damage to our cells. They also increase our risk of disease, including heart disease. The antioxidants found in our colorful produce “attack” free radicals and decrease this risk.

Fruit and veggies are loaded with **vitamins and minerals** that are aligned with heart health including B vitamins (folic acid and B6), as well as vitamins C, E, and beta carotene. Choose citrus, broccoli, asparagus, dark greens, sweet potatoes, papaya, cantaloupe and other produce rich in these vitamins and minerals.

Versatile **avocado** should be a regular on your shopping list to ensure that heart-healthy, risk-reducing monounsaturated fat is a steady part of your diet. While most fruits and vegetables don’t contain fat, satisfying avocado remains a solid source of heart-healthy fat.

### Five Simple Ways to Boost Heart Health with Fruits & Veggies:

1. Include low sugar, canned fruit that’s a perfect pair for heart-healthy foods like low sodium cottage cheese, fiber-rich oatmeal, and non-fat, plain, Greek yogurt.
2. Level up your sandwich with dark greens and sliced avocado to sneak in some veggies *and* do something great for your heart.
3. Seek color! Visit your local farmers market or produce section for colorful fruits and veggies. Aim for your basket to reflect the rainbow.
4. Roast, grill, sauté! Versatile veggies and greens can be prepared and enjoyed in a variety of ways. Add them to add to salads, grains, eggs and more. Or simply savor them alongside a lean protein for an easy dinner that comes together in minutes.
5. Canned beans are a simple way to add protein to veggies, grains and more. Try this [seasonal salad](#) that features crunchy, roasted chickpeas!

*This article is brought to you by [Allison J Stowell, MS, RD](#) & [Produce for Better Health Foundation](#)*

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