

# Eating The Rainbow: Why Eating a Variety of Fruits and Vegetables Is Important for Optimal Health



Eating the rainbow is a fundamental healthy eating tip. (And no, not artificially colored foods like Skittles or M&Ms!)

But what does it mean? Why is it important to get a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables in your diet?

You may be tempted to find a few foods you or your kids or family members like and to focus on eating those. And it can be easy to fall into routines. But the truth is: Our bodies benefit from variety. For optimal health, we need a rainbow of nutrients and colors.

In fact, **the variety of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and phytochemicals in fruits and vegetables have enormous healing powers.** And many of them bring their own distinctive colors.

Eating a diversity of colorful foods can be an easy way to get a complete range of the vitamins and minerals your body needs to thrive. The advice to “eat the rainbow” is often used with kids. And while kids especially need a diversity of foods in their diets, so do adults.

## Why Are Fruits and Vegetables So Many Different Colors?

Each color in fruits and vegetables is caused by specific phytonutrients, which are natural chemicals that help protect plants from germs, bugs, the sun’s harmful rays, and other threats.

And each color indicates an abundance of specific nutrients.

# Most Americans Aren't Getting the Range of Colorful Foods They Need

According to a 2009 phytonutrients [report](#) (based on data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys), **8 out of 10 people in the US are falling short in virtually every color category of phytonutrients.**

Based on the report,

- 69% of Americans are falling short in green phytonutrients
- 78% of Americans are falling short in red phytonutrients
- 86% of Americans are falling short in white phytonutrients
- 88% of Americans are falling short in purple and blue phytonutrients
- 79% of Americans are falling short in yellow and orange phytonutrients

Now, let's take a look at what the color of your food can tell you about its nutrition — and at how you can get more of the colorful range of phytonutrients to help your body function at its best.

## Red Fruits and Vegetables Help Fight Cancer, Reduce the Risk of Diabetes and Heart Disease, Improve Skin Quality, and More

Red fruits and vegetables contain phytochemicals, including lycopene and ellagic acid. These powerful nutrients have been studied for their cancer-fighting effects and other health benefits. For example, a daily dose of *tomato sauce has been found to reverse the progression of [prostate cancer](#)*. Watermelon is even higher in lycopene than tomatoes, and the lycopene may be more bioavailable.

Watermelon is also rich in a phytonutrient called [citrulline](#), which may work as a *treatment for mild to moderate [erectile dysfunction](#)*.

Also, strawberries have been found to [prevent](#) and even [reverse](#) esophageal cancer.

Getting your phytonutrients from whole foods is best. In fact, taking phytonutrients, like lycopene and beta-carotene, in supplement form because may [increase](#) the risk of cancer. But consuming these phytonutrients in whole-food form, like tomato sauce, has been found to [decrease](#) the risk of cancer.

## Examples of Healthy Red Foods to Try

- Red peppers
- Tomatoes
- Strawberries
- Raspberries
- Watermelon

- Apples
- Cranberries
- Cherries
- Grapes
- Red onions
- Pomegranate
- Beets

## **Orange and Yellow Fruits and Vegetables Improve Immune Function, Reduce the Risk of Heart Disease, Promote Eye Health, and More**

Orange and yellow fruits and vegetables are rich in vitamin C and carotenoids, including beta-carotene. Some carotenoids, most notably beta-carotene, convert to vitamin A within the body, which helps promote healthy vision and cell growth.

Citrus fruits contain a unique phytonutrient called [hesperidin](#), which helps to increase blood flow. This has important health ramifications. *If you tend to get cold hands and feet, eating an orange a day may help keep your hands and feet warm.* More importantly, consuming citrus may also reduce your risk of [stroke](#).

### **Examples of Healthy Orange and Yellow Foods to Try**

- Oranges
- Grapefruit
- Lemons
- Mangoes
- Papayas
- Carrots
- Sweet potatoes
- Winter squash (butternut, kabocha, delicata, acorn)
- Yellow summer squash
- Corn
- Cantaloupe
- Orange and yellow peppers
- Golden beets
- Pineapple
- Peaches

## **Green Fruits and Vegetables Boost the Immune System, Help Detoxify the Body, Restore Energy and Vitality, and More**

Greens are one of healthiest foods we can eat. Green fruits and vegetables are rich in lutein, isothiocyanates, isoflavones, and [vitamin K](#) — which is essential for [blood and bone health](#).

In addition, green vegetables are rich in folate – a nutrient especially important for pregnant women to consume to help prevent congenital disabilities.

[Cruciferous vegetables](#), like broccoli, have been shown to [enhance](#) immune function, while dark leafy greens like kale may improve [mood](#).

Kiwi fruit has been shown to help alleviate a wide array of maladies, from the common cold to [IBS](#) to [insomnia](#), and may even help [repair DNA damage](#).

## **Examples of Healthy Green Foods to Try**

- Broccoli
- Kale
- Romaine lettuce
- Collard greens
- Brussels sprouts
- Green grapes
- Green apples
- Asparagus
- Spinach
- Swiss chard
- Arugula
- Green beans
- Peas
- Zucchini
- Kiwi fruit
- Avocado
- Edamame

## **Blue and Purple Fruits and Vegetables Fight Cancer and Unwanted Inflammation and Help Keep You Young**

Blue and purple fruits and vegetables are rich in phytonutrients, including anthocyanins and resveratrol, and have been studied extensively for their anti-cancer and anti-aging properties.

[Studies show](#) that the bioactive phytochemicals in berries work to repair damage from oxidative stress and inflammation.

**Red cabbage, which is purple, is one of the best superfood bargains and has the highest level of [antioxidants](#) per dollar.**

## Examples of Healthy Blue and Purple Foods to Try

- Blueberries
- Blackberries
- Red (purple) grapes
- Red (purple) cabbage
- Eggplant
- Plums
- Prunes
- Figs

## White and Brown Fruits and Vegetables Protect Against Certain Cancers, Keep Bones Strong, and Are A Heart-Healthy Choice

White and brown produce may not be as brightly colored as other foods, but they still are a healthy choice and have phytonutrients.

Like broccoli, cauliflower is a [cruciferous](#) vegetable rich in an anti-cancer compound called sulforaphane. Garlic and onions are in the allium family of vegetables and contain the powerful [cancer-fighting](#) compounds allicin and quercetin.

And phytonutrients in white button [mushrooms](#) have been found to inhibit aromatase activity and [breast cancer](#) cell proliferation.

## Examples of Healthy White and Brown Foods to Try

- Cauliflower
- Garlic
- Onions
- Mushrooms
- Potatoes
- Parsnips
- Daikon radish
- Jicama

## Tips to Help You Eat the Rainbow Every Day

Yes, eating a variety of colorful foods is good for your health. But how do you make that happen?

Use these tips to create more colorful meals:

- **Eat a beautiful breakfast.** Instead of boring bagels, eggs, or yogurt, start your day with a green smoothie, oatmeal topped with red berries, or a scramble filled with red peppers, mushrooms, carrots, or other colorful veggies.

- **Enjoy exciting salads.** Large, colorful salads are the perfect way to incorporate lots of colorful veggies (and fruits!) into your diet. Eat them for lunch or dinner. And try to have at least one per day.
- **Liven up your lunch.** Veggie sandwiches and wraps (including lettuce wraps) and soups, stews, and chili can help your get a balanced selection of colorful foods for lunch.
- **Make vegetables the main dish.** Try new recipes for dishes, such as tempeh vegetable stir-fries, vegetable curries, and Buddha bowls.
- **Make a rainbow meal.** Try creating a meal that uses every color — red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, white, and brown. (If you have kids, they may love this idea.)

## How to Learn to Love Vegetables and Fruits

If you grew up eating only a few fruits and vegetables, you might not have developed an appreciation for produce. But don't worry. You can retrain your taste buds to love broccoli, kale, and beets!

Here's what you can do for yourself and for kids:

Step 1: Avoid processed food with lots of meat, cheese, salt, and sugar. These foods overstimulate your taste buds and put you into the [Pleasure Trap](#), making fresh fruits and vegetables taste boring in comparison.

Step 2: Try new vegetables and fruits over and over again in different ways. It can take up to 12-18 tastes to acquire a taste for a new food. So, if you once hated arugula or mushrooms, that's okay. Try again in a different recipe. You might surprise yourself.

# Eating the Rainbow

Post Test – April 2019

**Please keep this test and certificate in your files for Licensing.  
You do not need to send it in to our office or the State.**

1. For optimal health, you need to eat a \_\_\_\_\_ of nutrients and colors in the food you serve.
2. Eating a diversity of colorful foods can be an easy way to get a complete range of the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ your body needs to thrive.
3. 43% of Americans are falling short in green phytonutrients.  
True or False?
4. Red fruits and vegetables contain \_\_\_\_\_, including lycopene and ellagic acid.
5. Citrus fruits contain a unique phytonutrient called \_\_\_\_\_, which helps to increase blood flow.
6. Green fruits and vegetables are some of the healthiest foods we can eat.  
True or False?
7. Red cabbage, which is purple, is one of the best superfood bargains and has the highest level of \_\_\_\_\_ per dollar.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ is a cruciferous vegetable rich in an anti-cancer compound called sulforaphane.
9. Large, colorful \_\_\_\_\_ are the perfect way to incorporate lots of colorful veggies and fruits into your diet.
10. It can take up to \_\_\_\_\_ tastes to acquire a taste for a new food. If the kids didn't like it before try it again in a different recipe!!

March 2019 Quiz Answers. 1.Ascorbic acid 2.Fruits/vegetables 3.Collagen  
4.False 5.Scurvy 6.Deficiency 7.Rickets 8.True 9.Melatonin 10.Milk



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