



## Vegetables and Fruits Can Pack a Disease-Fighting Wallop

# Super Foods

By Deanna L. Thompson

If researchers announced that a magic pill could reduce your risk of cancer, heart disease and stroke, you'd probably rush to the drug store to buy it. Well, what if you found out that a magic pill is available and you already can buy it—at a farmers' market, a roadside stand or your local supermarket?

The “magic pill” is vegetables and fruits, which are “chock-full” of vitamins, nutrients and phytochemicals that offer valuable protection against disease. In 1997, the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) reviewed 4,500 research studies and made a surprising discovery: Vegetables and fruits are the most protective element of the diet.

“We know that having at least five servings daily decreases the incidence of cancer by 20 percent,” says Melanie R. Polk, R.D., AICR's director of nutrition education. “Just that one change in diet can make that much of a difference.”

Health authorities agree: You should eat at least five to nine servings of vegetables and fruits daily. However, research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that four out of five Americans don't eat the recommended amount.

Are you one of them? Spring is a great time to rediscover the flavor and disease-

fighting value of fresh fruits and vegetables.

### What's in This “Magic Pill”?

Vegetables and fruits are packed with things that are good for you, including fiber, vitamins and minerals. But the newest superstars are phytochemicals, which offer protective benefits to plants as they grow. Researchers have been discovering that they offer similar benefits to humans. Polk notes: “There are thousands of different phytochemicals, and they perform a variety of functions such as protecting cell walls from invasion, altering hormone levels and detoxifying carcinogens.”

To ensure that you get the benefits of the many known phytochemicals, you need to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables. The same substances that pack a disease-fighting wallop also give fruits and vegetables their vibrant colors. “Strive to eat a rainbow of colors every day, and you'll reap the benefits of an array of phytochemicals,” says Nelda Mercer, R.D., spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association.

She recommends coloring your plate with the following fruits and vegetables:

- Blue/purple—plums, purple grapes, blueberries and eggplant, which con-

tain phytochemicals and other nutrients linked to lower risks of cancer and healthy aging

- Green—leafy greens, broccoli and zucchini, which contain phytochemicals that appear to lower the risks of some cancers and to promote good vision
- Orange/yellow—yellow squash, apricots and sweet potatoes, which contain various phytochemicals that have been linked to eye and cardiovascular health, as well as to lower cancer risk
- Red—tomatoes, raspberries, strawberries, pink grapefruit and watermelon, with phytochemicals including lycopene, which may reduce the risk of prostate cancer and lead to better urinary tract health
- White or tan—onions and cauliflower, which contains substances that may slow the growth of tumors

### Getting Your Five to Nine Servings

So are you convinced that you should try harder to get vegetables and fruits *continued on page 10*



## Buy it Fresh at a Farmers' Market

You can find fresh, locally grown produce at farmers' markets and roadside stands throughout the United States—and that's good news for your health. Fruits and vegetables not only taste best when they're fresh, but that's also when they pack the biggest nutritional punch.

Can't make it to a farmers' market? Supermarkets today stock fresh produce that still contains plenty of nutrients. What is most important is that you work to eat your five to nine servings each day.

To locate a farmers' market in your area, visit [www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/map.htm](http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/map.htm). Below are just a few, which are located right in the heart of the big city!

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into your diet? It's not as difficult to get the recommended five to nine servings as many people think. "Try for a minimum of three servings of vegetables and two servings of fruit daily," says Mercer. "Men, who generally consume more calories than women, should shoot for the higher end of the recommendation."

Polk notes that a serving is much smaller than many people think: "A half cup of cooked vegetables or one medium fresh fruit—these are not big servings."

Think ahead to be sure you're including fruits and vegetables at every snack and meal. You can bring carrots in your brownbag lunch. Or try a lunch salad that includes spinach, tomatoes and carrots. Add zucchini or other vegetables to your pasta sauce at dinner.

"Slice a banana over your cereal," suggests Polk. "Have fruit in the afternoon rather than going to the vending machine for cookies or chips. Eat a bowl of berries instead of ice cream in front of the television."

Vegetables and fruits are the original fast food—and they're a lot healthier than the drive-through or vending machine variety. ●

**CALIFORNIA: San Francisco**  
Ferry Plaza Farmers Market  
One Ferry Building  
San Francisco, CA 94111  
(415) 291-FARM or 291-3276  
[www.ferryplazafarmersmarket.com](http://www.ferryplazafarmersmarket.com)

Started as a one-time event in 1992, the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market became a year-round market the following year. Located in a restored 1898 Ferry Terminal, this farmers' market includes produce—much of it organic—and flowers from Bay Area farmers, as well as meat, seafood, breads, cheeses and jams.

**GEORGIA: Atlanta**  
DeKalb Farmers Market  
3000 East Ponce De Leon Ave.  
Decatur, GA 30030  
(404) 377-6400  
[www.dekalbfarmersmarket.com](http://www.dekalbfarmersmarket.com)

Now a year-round market selling everything from organic foods to meats to vegetables, the DeKalb Farmers Market was a mere produce stand in a greenhouse when it opened in 1977. Today, it is one of the nation's largest enclosed markets.

**ILLINOIS: Chicago**  
Daley Plaza Farmers Market  
55 W. Randolph St. (on the plaza)  
Chicago, IL

This seasonal market, featuring fresh produce, flowers, herbs and spices, is one of more than two dozen open-air farmers' markets, which operate from May or June until October.

**MASSACHUSETTS: Boston**  
The Haymarket  
Downtown Boston  
Behind Faneuil Hall Marketplace  
Boston, MA

For more than 200 years, this multi-block open-air farmers' market has operated in this same location. You'll find dozens of vendors selling fresh vegetables, fruits, fish, cheeses and more.

**MISSOURI: St. Louis**  
Soulard Market  
730 Carroll Street  
St. Louis, MO 63104  
(314) 622-4180

This year-round farmers' market, which dates to the 1800s, is the last surviving public market in St. Louis. Located in one of the city's historic districts, Soulard Market has plenty of atmosphere and aisle after aisle of fresh produce, herbs and spices, individual farm stands, poultry, meat and more.