



Fact Sheet 7

Getting your five a day

We all know that we're supposed to eat at least 'Five A Day' of fruit and vegetables. Research has shown that eating more of these foods can help to reduce the risk of the two main killer diseases in the UK - the cancer and coronary heart disease that account for 60% of early deaths.

Eating a variety of fruit and vegetables will provide you with a balance of vitamins and minerals, along with fibre and antioxidants. All the things you need for good health. Fruit and vegetables are also generally low fat, low calorie foods. So eating more of these instead of foods high in fat and sugars (processed foods, snacks, convenience meals) can help you achieve and keep a healthy weight.

As the government's '5 A Day' scheme implies, you should be aiming to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day. However, this is a guideline only and we would recommend six to eight portions a day, to ensure you get a better supply of the nutrients you need (in the USA the recommendation is now a minimum nine portions a day). The portions can come from fresh, frozen, canned*, juiced and dried forms of fruit and veg. (*Don't rely too much on canned fruit and veg as the processing destroys some nutrients and many canned foods contain added sugar and/or salt.)

Portion Sizes

How do you know you're getting enough - in other words, what is a portion?

As a rough guide, a portion is about 80g of fresh vegetable or fruit (not including stones or inedible peel). That's for a person of average build and reasonable activity levels. So you will need to adjust it if, for example you do strenuous exercise every day.

Here are some examples of single portion sizes:

- 1 apple
- 1 pear
- 1 handful of raw vegetable sticks (carrots/celery/peppers)
- 1 tablespoon of raisins
- 1 medium banana
- 1 medium glass of pure orange juice
- 1 handful of grapes or berries (e.g. strawberries, blueberries etc)
- 1 cereal bowl of mixed salad
- 2 medium plums
- 2 kiwi fruit
- 2 broccoli florets
- 2 satsumas
- 2 halves of canned peaches
- 3 heaped tablespoons of peas
- 3 heaped tablespoons of sweetcorn
- 7 cherry tomatoes
- 12 chunks of canned pineapple

Portion Pointers

- Remember that variety is important as different fruit and vegetables contain different combinations of fibre, vitamins and minerals.
- Only one of your portions each day should come from fruit and vegetable juices or smoothies - as the juicing process reduces fibre and releases fruit sugars that can damage teeth.
- Dried fruit should also count as only one portion a day, because the sugar content is much more concentrated.
- Pulses, such as beans and lentils can count as a portion, but only once a day, as they do not contain the same mixture of nutrients as fruit and vegetables.
- Unfortunately, the good old potato does not count as a portion as it is considered a 'starchy' food. But foods such as potatoes, and wholegrain pastas, breads and rice are still important in a healthy diet.

The government's 'Five A Day' scheme encourages food manufacturers to promote healthy eating by using portion indicators on packaging. To use the government's logo (a series of five coloured squares ascending from left to right) a manufacturer has to comply with strict nutrition criteria that take into account portion size, as well as fat, sugar and salt levels. However, beware because some manufacturers and retailers (e.g. Heinz, Knorr and Sainsbury's) have introduced their own schemes and these do not always tie in with government advice. For example, Knorr Vie Tomato and Basil Soup claims to contain more than three portions of vegetables. But a carton contains 200g of tomatoes and only small amounts of other vegetables, so it should only count as one portion. The product is also high in salt, which reduces potential health benefits.

Q-active have got together with Medirest and Dietetics to look at the food the restaurant serves and to make sure it complies with the strict government guidelines. We will soon be putting 'five a day' stickers on all food that counts in the restaurant and other eating places on site to help you make an informed choice.

Portion Planning

Finally, to help you get your daily fix of five, here's an easy daily plan:

Breakfast: Have some fruit juice or fruit (or both) with breakfast.

Mid-morning: Keep a well stocked fruit bowl at home or work so you can snack on fruit during the day.

Lunch: Have a bowl of salad with your lunch, an extra serving of vegetables or something like vegetable chilli.

Mid-afternoon: Snack on fruit or raw vegetables like carrots, peppers and celery.

Dinner: Eat two/three types of vegetables with your dinner. (If you use a steamer you don't need lots of pans.)