

Eat more veggies – they're better than fruit, new study suggests

Carolyn Khew

Everyone knows that fruit and vegetables are good for health, but how much is good enough?

In Singapore, the Health Promotion Board (HPB) recommends two servings of each every day, but in Australia, it is two portions of fruit and five of vegetables. In Britain, a total of five servings is the guide, while in the United States, it is simply more is better.

A recent survey conducted by the University College London now suggests seven servings should be the aim, with five servings consisting of vegetables. This has led to a call in Britain to change its five-serving recommendation.

In response to media queries, an HPB spokesman said that different countries have different considerations when it comes to setting dietary guidelines. These range from portion sizes to eating patterns.

But the spokesman said the general consensus is that 400g to 500g of fruit and vegetables daily is necessary for good health. The British study recommends 560g a day.

Dietitians whom The Sunday Times spoke to also said that the current recommendation here is sufficient to stay healthy.

Clinical dietitian Jaclyn Reutens of Aptima Nutrition and Sports Consultants added the bigger issue is that Singaporeans are not even meeting the current local standard.

She pointed to the latest National Nutrition Survey conducted in 2010 which showed that only about 25 to 30 per cent of adult Singaporeans had two servings of vegetables and two servings of fruit each day.

"Increasing the recommendations may not necessarily make much of a difference at this stage," she added.

Dr Lim Su Lin, chief dietitian at the National University Hospital, said that raising the current recommendation could persuade more people to eat more

ADD COLOUR TO YOUR DIET

To get the most from daily servings of fruit and vegetables, nutritionists say spread out your picks across these colour groups.

RED

■ **Tomato:** Cook first as the heat makes lycopene, an antioxidant which prevents prostate cancer, easier to absorb.

■ **Strawberries:** Contain ellagic acid which possesses anti-cancer properties and promotes wound healing.



GREEN

■ **Kiwi:** A single fruit gives the daily requirement for vitamin C, which boosts immunity and stimulates collagen production.

■ **Broccoli:** Has strong anti-cancer properties. Also contains calcium and is high in vitamin C.

■ **Spinach:** Rich in lutein and zeaxanthin, it helps to prevent poor eyesight in old age.



YELLOW/ORANGE

■ **Orange:** High in vitamin C and also known for its antibacterial and antiseptic qualities.

■ **Cantaloupe (rock melon, right):** Its orange colour is a result of beta-carotene, which converts to vitamin A in the body.

PURPLE/BLUE

■ **Eggplant:** Has flavonoids which protect against heart disease and some cancers. Eat with its skin on as that is where most of the nutrients are.

■ **Blueberries:** Protect against heart disease and slows ageing process.

WHITE

■ **Cabbage and cauliflower:** These cruciferous veggies contain isothiocyanates which may reduce the risk of cancer or prevent tumours from forming.

Note: One serving of fruit is equivalent to 10 small grapes or a medium banana or apple. For vegetables, 150g of raw produce make up one serving.

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Sources: Ms Jaclyn Reutens, clinical dietitian at Aptima Nutrition and Sports Consultants, Health Promotion Board, and Dr Lim Su Lin, chief dietitian at National University Hospital



PHOTOS: TNP FILE, ST FILE

fruit and vegetables.

"I think increasing it to three servings of vegetables in addition to two servings of fruit... is achievable for (Singaporeans)," she said.

"It will be good to first look at all the literature available and make recommendations based on solid evidence."

What everyone agrees on is that fruit and vegetables are an important part of our diet.

The study by University College London linked seven portions of fresh fruit – not canned

– and vegetables a day to a 42 per cent lower risk of death, 25 per cent lower risk of cancer and 31 per cent lower risk of heart disease or stroke, according to The Guardian newspaper.

"From our study it looks like vegetables are better than fruit," added one of the study's authors, Dr Oyinlola Oyebo.

Dr Lim said that while fruit are rich in vitamin C and other antioxidants, "many people underestimate the benefits of vegetables and think that it is not important to eat vegetables as long as they have fruits in their diet".

"Most people feel that fruits are sweeter and tastier. However many studies have shown that vegetables are more potent in the prevention of cancer," she said.

Fruits contain fruit sugars and eating too many may increase blood sugar levels and cause weight gain, said Miss Sarah Sinaram, senior dietitian at the Raffles Internal Medicine Centre.

She added: "Practise moderation when eating all foods."

✉ kcarolyn@sph.com.sg