

# Nourishing Body

*Margaret Nowotarski, Ph.D. reports on the health benefits of whole food.*

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The statistics are alarming:

- **One in three people will get cancer at some time in their life**
- **Heart disease is the leading cause of death**
- **Poor nutrition and physical inactivity together are the second actual cause of preventable death in the United States**

On the other hand new evidence shows that:

- **Eating five or more fruits and vegetables per day cuts cancer risk in half**
- **People who eat more fruits and vegetables have a 30% lower risk of premature heart attack than people who eat a few**
- **About 25% fewer strokes are projected for adults who eat 8 or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day**
- **Fruits and vegetables may help keep blood sugar down and control diabetes.**

For many years researchers have recognized that diets high in fruits, vegetables, grains and legumes strengthen our immune system, prevent or reverse degenerative diseases and delay the aging process.

Fruits and vegetables are among the most healthful foods that we can eat. They are very low in fat, low in calories and high in fiber. They are packed with nutrients, vitamin C, vitamin A, alpha- and beta-carotene, minerals, antioxidants and hundreds of phytochemicals.

Antioxidants are specific vitamins, minerals and enzymes that protect cells against damage from oxidation.

Phytochemicals are the biologically active substances in plants that give them color, flavour, and natural disease resistance. They reduce cell damage, stimulate the immune system, and fight bacteria and viruses. So far, more than 25,000 different phytonutrients have been discovered.

Medical studies over the last 20 years link consumption of fruits and vegetables to a reduced risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, cataracts and some cancers. The high level of antioxidants and phytochemicals appear to be responsible.

There is growing scientific evidence that whole foods, rather than singular, artificially isolated supplements are the key elements in health and disease prevention. Whole foods are alive with enzyme activity, while isolated vitamins are parts of foods. In nature, vitamins and minerals are never isolated. They are always synergistically connected with each other and with hundreds of antioxidants and phytonutrients. No nutrient stands alone in whole foods.

Even though fruits and vegetables are so healthful, many of us have a hard time consuming 5 to 9 servings per day recommended by the National Cancer Institute. According to the latest surveys, Americans consume an average of 3.4 servings, and children age 6 to 12 only one-half of the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

**And you, how many fruits and vegetables did you eat today?**

Get your greens, reds, oranges, yellows, purples -- variety is the key! Color your daily rainbow diet with:

- **dark greens** -- broccoli, asparagus, kale
- **deep reds** -- tomatoes, cherries, beets, strawberries
- **bright oranges** -- carrots, mandarins, oranges, sweet potatoes, mango
- **sunshine yellow** -- squash, pineapple and corn
- **blue and purples** -- blueberries, eggplant and plum

Everybody at every age needs fruits and vegetables. This especially includes growing children, convalescents, the elderly and the athletes.

Life is all about the choices you make! How you choose to live and eat has a huge impact on your health, longevity and quality of life.