**Day 6**

**Title: A Second Helping of Vegetables**

Yesterday we covered just how amazing vegetables are and how important they are to a balanced diet. But there’s still more to talk about. The vegetable food group has so much variety. If your idea of vegetables is potatoes, baby carrots, and the occasional celery stick, you’re in for a treat.

**A vegetable medley**

One way to think about the incredible diversity of vegetables is by breaking it down into five different groups:

1. Dark-green vegetables include lettuces and other greens, such as collard greens, turnip greens, mustard greens, kale, spinach, arugula, and broccoli. Dark-green vegetables are good sources of vitamin C, iron, and calcium. If you can’t eat dairy, dark green vegetables can provide calcium to your diet. These vegetables are also great sources of fiber, and provide roughage that keeps your bowels healthy.
2. Starchy vegetables include corn, potatoes, peas, cassava, plantains, and taro. Starchy vegetables are good sources of fiber, folate, and other B-vitamins.
3. Red and orange vegetables are easy to identify, thanks to their bright colors. These include carrots, peppers, squashes, sweet potatoes, and tomatoes. They provide a lot of potassium, vitamin C, and beta-carotene. These vitamins and minerals help lower blood pressure, help your eyes to stay healthy, and strengthen your immune system.
4. Beans and peas include black beans, white beans, pinto beans, and kidney beans, among others. This group also includes chickpeas, lentils, and soybeans. Beans and peas are a special type of vegetable. Since they contain a lot of protein, they are very good substitutes for meat. They can be counted as a vegetable or a protein. If you generally eat meat, you should count beans and peas toward your vegetables. If you’re a vegetarian or vegan, or if you rarely eat meat, you should count some of your beans and peas toward your protein, and the rest toward your vegetables. Start by adding them toward your protein. If there are any cups left, add them to your vegetables.
5. The “others” category includes all kinds of vegetables. This list of vegetables is very long, but includes things like squashes, cucumbers, okra, snow peas, iceberg lettuce, onions, cauliflower, and mushrooms.

**What are good ways to cook vegetables?**

Both raw and cooked vegetables have a place in your healthy, balanced diet. The best way to cook vegetables is by broiling, roasting, baking, and sauteing. Boiling vegetables for a long time can transfer a lot of the vitamins and minerals into the cooking water. If you choose to boil vegetables, such as different types of greens, don’t throw out the water. Try adding it to a soup or cook a grain in the broth.

Fried vegetables may be tasty, but they also turn what is naturally a low-calorie, low-fat food into a high-calorie, high fat food. Eat fried vegetables only once in awhile.

**Now for a word on potatoes…**

People who eat a Western-based diet tend to eat white potatoes A LOT. White potatoes do have some vitamin C and potassium (especially in their skin), but they are digested very quickly. This causes a quick spike in your blood sugar levels. After that spike comes a crash, which leaves you hungry again.

With this vegetable, preparation makes all the difference. Most of the white potatoes that we eat are in the form of french fries or potato chips. Frying potatoes adds a lot of fat and calories to an otherwise healthy food. French fries also don’t have the potato skin, which is an important source of vitamins and minerals.

Compare 100 grams of a baked Russet potato and 100 grams of French fries (fried in vegetable oil):

* Calories: potato has 74.5 vs. French fries have 310
* Fat: potato has 0.1 grams vs. French fries have 14.7 grams
* Carbohydrates: potato has 21.4 grams vs. French fries have 41.4 grams
* Sodium: potato has 14 mg vs. French fries have 210 mg

A baked Russet potato does not have much fat or sodium. It also has a moderate amount of calories. But when that potato is made into French fries, it suddenly has a lot of calories, fat, and sodium. If a lot of your vegetable servings come from french fries or potato chips, replace them with a healthier option.

**A final word**

Yay! You’ve spent two days learning about vegetables. Hopefully your interest in this vital part of a balanced diet is piqued and you’re ready to fill half your plate with delightful vegetables. Create a colorful plate and you’ll achieve vegetable variety. Remember to choose healthy preparation methods, like baking, roasting, and broiling. And save those french fries and fried vegetables for rare occasions.

**Sources:**

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