Budget-Friendly Tips for Getting More Fruits, Veggies, and Whole Grains in Your Diet

Previously provided by: 1LT Jennifer West, Dietetic Intern

Eating the recommended amounts of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains provides long-term health benefits. These foods can help manage weight, improve cholesterol, and improve gut function. Additionally, a diet rich in these foods can protect against the risk of some types of cancers and other chronic diseases. These categories of food contain a variety of vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other health-promoting factors that are essential for good health.

The recommended amounts for adults are roughly two servings of fruit, three servings of veggies, and six servings of grains (make sure ½ are whole grains). More simply, aim for filling ½ your plate with fruits and veggies, and ¼ of your plate with grains.

Below are some ideas for getting more of these foods into your diet:

1) Meal Tips:
   Breakfast: Add veggies to egg dishes, fruit to cereals/yogurts, or opt for old-fashioned or steel-cut oats instead of “instant” sugary versions.
   Lunch: Add extra veggies to a sandwich or wrap; ask for “whole wheat” breads; have a small piece of fruit instead of a “treat” at lunch.
   Dinner: Add extra veggies to stir-fry or pizza; add veggies to casseroles like lasagna; shop for whole-grain pasta and bread; try whole grains like brown rice, quinoa, or bulgur instead of white rice.
   Snacks: Swap chips for popcorn (avoid/limit butter and salt!); try fresh veggies with hummus; eat a piece of fruit with nut butter (like apples and peanut butter).

2) Cooking/Prep Tips:
If you “don’t like vegetables”, commit to trying them in a new way: grilling, sautéing, broiling, steaming, adding them to noodles, adding low-calorie sauces, or trying them raw with a low-calorie dip or dressing. The flavors of vegetable can change with different ways of preparing them.

3) Shopping Tips:
Grocery stores and commissaries usually display the freshest foods along the perimeter of the store. Buying fresh vegetables and fruit in season is the best way to increase nutrients and save money on produce. Produce that is purchased when in season is usually less expensive. Choosing 100% whole grain baked products such as breads, muffins, tortillas, and cereals is a good way to incorporate whole grains into your diet. Most Americans eat more than enough protein, and animal proteins are usually the most expensive item in the grocery basket. Try a vegetarian meal once or twice a week to reduce your overall meal cost. Additionally, you can look for the Dietitian approved “Thumbs Up” symbol to shop for healthier items at the commissary.

4) Storage Tips:
Place fresh fruit in a bowl on the counter or table as a visual reminder to eat them! If you find you don’t use fresh vegetables very quickly, opt for frozen ones. Use what you need for the meal and keep the remainder frozen.

Eating healthy doesn’t have to be expensive or complex. You can use these tips to pack more nutrients into your meals and save money at the same time. If you’d like additional information contact your local Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN). Call the Jennifer Moreno Clinic at (210) 808-2232 to make a nutrition appointment.

References:
Tobacco Cessation Program

This live, in-person program is comprised of four classes, provided once a week for four weeks. Participants interested in receiving pharmaceutical cessation aids will meet one-on-one with a Provider. More information will be provided during the first Tobacco Cessation Class. Please call JBSA-FSH Army Health Promotion at 210.916.7646 for class schedules and to enroll.

Program Eligibility:
The Tobacco Cessation Program is open to all TRICARE beneficiaries.