

Eat a rainbow

3 minute read | Produced: October 2014 | Revised: July 2021



Key points:

- There are five different colour categories for fruits and vegetables with their own unique set of phytochemicals.
- Phytochemicals give fruits and vegetables their vibrant colour.
- Eating a rainbow of coloured fruits and vegetables can ensure you receive a variety of nutrients.

Are colours of vegetables and fruits important to health?

Fruit and vegetables fall into five different colour categories: red, purple/blue, orange, green and white/brown. Each colour carries its own set of unique disease fighting chemicals called phytochemicals. It is these phytochemicals that give fruits and vegetables their vibrant colour and of course some of their healthy properties.

What's in a colour?

Purple / blue



The plant pigment anthocyanin is what gives blue/purple fruits and vegetables their distinctive colour. Anthocyanin also has antioxidant properties that protect cells from damage and can help reduce the risk of cancer, stroke and heart disease.

Red



Red fruits and vegetables are coloured by a natural plant pigment called lycopene. Lycopene is a powerful antioxidant that can help reduce the risk of cancer and keep our heart healthy.

Orange / yellow



Carotenoids give this group their vibrant colour. A well-known carotenoid called Betacarotene is found in sweet potatoes, pumpkins and carrots. It is converted to vitamin A, which helps maintain healthy mucous membranes and healthy eyes. Another carotenoid called lutein is stored in the eye and has been found to prevent cataracts and age-related macular degeneration, which can lead to blindness.

Green



Green vegetables contain a range of phytochemicals including carotenoids, indoles and saponins, all of which have anti-cancer properties. Leafy greens such as spinach and broccoli are also excellent sources of folate.

Brown / white



White fruits and vegetables contain a range of health-promoting phytochemicals such as allicin (found in garlic) which is known for its antiviral and antibacterial properties. Some members of the white group, such as bananas and potatoes, are also a good source of potassium.

Remember:

- There are five different colour categories for fruits and vegetables with their own unique set of phytochemicals.
- Colour categories include red, purple/blue, orange/yellow, green and brown/white.

Fruit and vegetable colour chart

Purple / blue	Red	Orange / yellow	Green	Brown / white
Beetroot	Tomato	Carrots	Spinach	Cauliflower
Red cabbage	Red capsicum	Rockmelon	Asparagus	Brown pears
Eggplant	Radishes	Lemons	Avocados	Mushrooms
Purple asparagus	Strawberries	Sweet potato	Broccoli	White peaches
Blackberries	Rhubarb	Pumpkin	Peas	Garlic
Blueberries	Cherries	Pineapples	Green apples	Bananas
Purple grapes	Red grapes	Mangoes	Green grapes	Potatoes
Plums	Raspberries	Corn	Limes	Dates
	Watermelon	Oranges	Kiwifruit	Onions
	Red apples	Squash	Green beans	Ginger
		Peaches	Lettuce	Parsnips
		Nectarines	Cabbage	Turnip
		Apricots	Celery	
		Grapefruit	Cucumber	
			Green capsicum	

Encouraging children to eat a rainbow

Offering a wide range of colours in children's food is not only visually appealing, but also ensures that children are receiving a great variety of nutrients. Here are some healthy ways you can interest children into the marvellous, colourful world of fruit and vegetables:

Create your own fruit and vegetable Rainbow

A great way to keep track of the colours children eat each day is to create a fruit and veg rainbow poster. Every time the children eat a colourful fruit and vegetable they can place a corresponding coloured sticker on the rainbow or get them to colour in a small section on the rainbow. This is also a great activity that parents can do with their children at home.

Create a rainbow on your plate

Make a tropical rainbow fruit salad with fruits of each colour: oranges, strawberries, mango, rockmelon, kiwifruit, bananas, and blueberries. Stir fry your own mix of vegetables using each colour: red onions, carrots, baby corn, broccoli and mushrooms.

Read a book – I can eat a rainbow by Annabel Karmel

I can eat a rainbow teaches kids how to eat healthily by enjoying a ‘rainbow’ of food, from purple plums to red apples to greens like spinach and celery. Each two-page spread focuses on food of a different colour.

Remember:

- Offer children a variety of fruits and vegetables from all the colour categories.
- Try fun activities to encourage trying new fruits and vegetables.

