

Eating your vegetables and fruit?

Many people we surveyed fell far short of eating five a day, and skimped on variety.

About 70 percent of us fail to eat five servings of fruit and vegetables every day, the low end of the amount recommended by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That's a shame, because doing so can reduce the risk of heart attacks, strokes, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers. The good news is that 58 percent of U.S. adults do say they eat the prescribed amount "every day" or "most days" of the week.

Those findings are from a recent survey by the Consumer Reports National Research Center, which asked 1,234 U.S. adults about their exercise and eating habits.

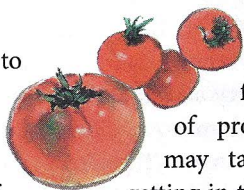
Our survey got very specific about what kinds of vegetables folks ate weekly. You can use these results to gauge how you're doing.

VARIETY COUNTS

While the number of vegetable servings is important, it isn't the only concern. It's also important to eat a variety of produce. The USDA advises Americans to choose vegetables from all of the following five categories each week:

- **Dark green** (kale, lettuce, mustard greens, and Swiss chard)
- **Orange** (carrots, pumpkin, sweet potatoes, and winter squash)
- **Legumes** (dried beans, lentils, and peas)
- **Starchy** (corn, green peas, and potatoes)
- **Other** (such as cabbage, cucumbers, and onions)

Most of the people we surveyed (66 percent) said they were satisfied with the amount they were already eating. Among that group, about half said they ate at least one vegetable from each category once a week or more,



and 36 percent ate five or more servings of produce every day. It may take some effort, but getting in the five-a-day is doable for many people.

MOST POPULAR VEGGIES

The most popular vegetables among our respondents included starchy vegetables (eaten at least once weekly by 83 percent); salad greens (eaten at least once weekly by 78 percent); and tomatoes (technically a fruit, but eaten at least once weekly by 71 percent).

White potatoes, consumed at least once each week by 61 percent of the respondents, were the starchy vegetable that was eaten most often.

Green vegetables were also among the most frequently eaten, and nearly 70 percent said they ate one or more dark green vegetables at least once a week. But only half of those surveyed ate at least one vegetable from each of the five groups on a weekly basis.

EXPAND YOUR CHOICES

While lettuce and white potatoes are a fine start, they're not necessarily the most nutrition-packed vegetables. Carrots were also popular with 6 of 10 people eating them at least once a week. A solid majority ate broccoli and corn and 4 of 10 enjoyed green peas and cucumbers at least once a week.

The respondents who eat vegetables were loyal to some of the more popular kinds. Broccoli, cucumbers, green peas, and peppers were each eaten at least once weekly by more than 4 of 10 people.

Beans were a bit less popular, and only about a third of respondents ate cabbage, celery, and spinach at least once weekly.

THE NEGLECTED ONES

Some vegetables seem to get no respect. Only 7 percent of the people we polled ate eggplant and just 4 percent ate bok choy at least once weekly, and large percentages of people said they never ate those vegetables. And pity the poor parsnip, eaten at least once a week by 3 percent and rarely or never by 87 percent. Other less popular vegetables included okra, Swiss chard, and turnips. Unfamiliarity and not knowing how to prepare those vegetables might be a reason for their neglect. Consider trying them at a restaurant first, and if you enjoy them, look for simple recipes for preparing them at home.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

There are a number of barriers that people said kept them from eating more vegetables. Almost a third said that vegetables were hard to store or went bad before they could be used. Others complained about the cost and the difficulty or length of time required to prepare them.

If those are among your reasons for eating fewer than the ideal servings of vegetables, consider buying frozen varieties to avoid spoilage and make preparation easier.

And yes, plain dislike plays a role in our eating habits. Some respondents said they avoided vegetables because another person at home didn't like them, and 13 percent admitted that they themselves disliked them.

The bottom line: For most of us, there's room for improvement when it comes to the amount of produce we eat. To discover some new (or just different) ways to add fruit and vegetables to your meals, check out the suggestions on the following page.

