

EAT THE RAINBOW FOR BETTER HEALTH

Did you know that eating a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables can change your life? The concept of eating a rainbow is an easy way to look at your plate to make sure you are getting all the major nutrients your body needs. Fruits and vegetables come in a variety of colors. With each of these colors comes nutrients with specific health benefits – it could be fighting inflammation, boosting your immunity, or supporting your brain function. The more colorful your plate is, the more beneficial it is for your health.

WHY COLOR MATTERS

Fruits and vegetables get their colors from pigments called phytochemicals. You may have heard of lycopene. That's what gives tomatoes and watermelon their characteristic red color. Lycopene is known for its role in supporting a healthy heart. Later in this article we'll go through the rainbow and discover the benefits of each color.

EASY, AFFORDABLE WAYS TO EAT THE RAINBOW

Eating a rainbow doesn't have to break the bank. Choose colorful fresh fruits and vegetables when they are in season. When not, canned and frozen are great options. Frozen mixed vegetable blends, like Normandy or California, or canned mixed vegetables can be used as a quick option. For more tips on shopping, visit [Nutrition.gov: Nutrition on a Budget](https://www.nutrition.gov/nutrition-on-a-budget).

There are plenty of inexpensive meals that feature a colorful array of fruit or veggies. Salads are an obvious choice but what about a colorful stir-fry, fruit salad, or soup? You can add mushrooms, peppers, or broccoli to pasta. Add corn and black beans to your chili. Stuff your enchiladas with zucchini and carrots. What can you create? Need more inspiration? Browse through a collection of [Nutrition.gov recipes](https://www.nutrition.gov/recipes).

LONG-TERM BENEFITS OF EATING THE RAINBOW

Now for a deep dive into each of those colors and how they can improve your health. This list is just a highlight of some of the nutrients and benefits found in each color. In other words, there is more to each color than what is listed here!

- ◆ **Reds:** Lycopene and Anthocyanins – These can protect against cancer, decrease risk of heart disease, reduce inflammation, and support brain function.
- ◆ **Orange and yellow:** Carotenoids - These can support eye health and immune function.
- ◆ **Green:** Chlorophyll, Indoles and more – These can protect against cancer, help with tissue repair and detoxification and support the immune system.

- ◆ **Blue and Purple:** Anthocyanins and Resveratrol – These can improve brain health and memory, reduce inflammation, and decrease the risk of heart disease.
- ◆ **White and Brown:** Anthoxanthins, Allicin, Quercetin – These can help with cholesterol levels, blood pressure, heart health, and muscle function, reduce inflammation, protect against cancer and support the immune system.

START EATING COLORFULLY TODAY

You don't have to overhaul your entire diet overnight. You can start with small, colorful changes which can add up to big health gains. Maybe you can commit to adding just one more color to your plate today. Or maybe you can strive to include two or three colors at your next meal. Whatever you choose, it's a step in the right, colorful direction.

Originally posted in November 2024, written by Brandy Kuebler, RDN, LD.
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