

# Fruits & Vegetables Prevent Disease

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Fruits are packed with protective phytonutrients.

In the not so distant past, nutritionists and consumers viewed fruits and vegetables as average foods. Recent studies have dramatically changed this perspective. We now know fruits and vegetables are packed with chemicals capable of preventing a host of diseases, including heart disease and cancers.

In this article, I highlight some of the scientific evidence for the protective benefits of plant-based diets, with an emphasis on the benefits of fruits and vegetables.

## Fruits and Vegetables Preventing Disease???

I know this may sound to some as plain nonsense, but the reality revealed now by hundreds of studies is that fruits and vegetables are almost like magic pills able to prevent the development of some of the most common and feared health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer, and obesity..

## Plant-Based Diets Prevent Heart Disease

As they lack cholesterol and have a very low amount of saturated fat, fruits and vegetables are the ideal choice for a heart-friendly diet. In addition, they have few calories and a high amount of fiber, both of which have a positive impact on cardiovascular health.

Data from the [Physicians' Health Study](#) showed that participants with the [highest intake of vegetables had a 23 percent reduction in occurrence of coronary heart disease](#). The *highest intake group* ate more than three servings of vegetables a day.

## Fruits and Vegetables Can Prevent Stroke

A somewhat similar study, this time on both men and women, done at [Harvard University - the Nurses' Health Study](#), has provided compelling evidence that fruits and vegetables protect against heart disease in both sexes. Moreover, they have significant stroke preventing properties. Compared with those in the lowest category of [fruit and vegetable intake \(less than 1.5 servings a day\)](#), [those who averaged 8 or more servings a day were 30% less likely to have had a heart attack or stroke.](#)

This is an unusually strong effect. To give you an idea of how powerful this is, daily aspirin reduces the risk of stroke by a maximum of 25%. In addition, taking aspirin daily is not an easy task for most people - even if we are talking about a baby aspirin. If you have tried to take a pill every day for years, you know what I am talking about. As good as aspirin is, the protective effect is rapidly lost when it is no longer taken. To say nothing about the adverse effects of this otherwise excellent drug. My point is not to discourage you from taking aspirin, if this is what your doctor recommended. What I want to suggest is you should seriously think about eating [eight or more servings of fruits and vegetables](#) daily, which will provide you with an even more powerful protection against stroke and other diseases.

## Plant-Based Diets Lower High Blood Pressure

[The DASH Eating Plan](#) is one of the best diets for people with high blood pressure. It is clinically proven to significantly reduce blood pressure in people with elevated levels.

One of the key components of the DASH diet, besides lowering the intake of sodium, is the emphasis on fruits and vegetables. In a 2,000 calories a day DASH eating plan, it is recommended one should eat [8-10 servings of fruits and vegetables](#) (pdf file).

## Fruits and Vegetables Prevent Cancer

According to the American Institute For Cancer Research, diets containing substantial and varied amounts of [vegetables and fruits will prevent 20% or more of all cases of cancer](#). Of all food groups, evidence of dietary protection against cancer is strongest and most consistent for diets high in vegetables and fruits.

Another study done at the University of California compared the diets of 2,200 people. Of these, 532 had pancreatic cancer, and 1,700 were healthy adults. The results, published in the September 2005 issue of the Cancer, Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention journal, indicate that [eating five servings of fruits and vegetables every day may cut the risk of pancreatic cancer in half!](#) The most protective foods in this study were onions, garlic, beans, carrots, corn, dark leafy vegetables and citrus fruits.

There is also emerging evidence that documents the protective benefits of fruits and vegetables in the [prevention of breast cancer](#).

Finally, this article [reviews 206 human epidemiological studies and 22 animal studies](#) on this topic, finding evidence for a protective effect of greater vegetable and fruit consumption for cancers of the stomach, esophagus, lung, oral cavity and pharynx,

endometrium, pancreas, and colon.

## Fruits and Vegetables Help Prevent Obesity

When it comes to weight control, few foods are more appropriate than fruits and vegetables. They are rich in nutrients yet low in calories. A typical serving of vegetables has about 25 calories, while an average serving of fruits has about 60 calories. If you take the above advice seriously and eat 4 servings of vegetables and 4 fruits daily, you total only 340 calories. This leaves you plenty of room to eat other healthy foods, like [whole grains](#), nuts, seeds, legumes, etc.

## Fruits and Vegetables Help Prevent Cataracts

According to a [study published in the July 2005 issue of the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition](#), eating more fruits and vegetables has a protective effect against cataracts. The study participants were over 35,000 women over 45 years of age involved in the women's health study, which is an ongoing study of female health professionals in the United States. During an average of 10 years of follow-up, over 2,000 women developed cataracts. Researchers found that women who reported eating the most fruits and vegetables had a 10-15 percent lower risk of developing cataracts than those who ate less. Fruits and vegetables are known to contain many antioxidants and phytochemicals which are the most likely candidates for this protective effect.