



Journey to Health: September Celebrates Fruits and Vegetables

By Eli Follick

September is National Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Month, a celebration of some of the most healthful foods you can eat



and a time designated to raise public awareness about the health benefits of consuming these nutrient-packed foods.

Though vegetables and fruits are composed primarily of carbohydrates and water, they provide vitamins, minerals, and bulk to the diet and contribute appetite appeal through color, texture, and flavor. Light green vegetables tend to provide vitamins, minerals, and cellulose necessary to provide the bulk, while yellow and dark green vegetables are excellent sources of vitamin A. Vegetable leaves are usually rich in calcium, iron, magnesium, vitamin C, and many of the B vitamins. The greener the leaf, the richer it will be in nutrients. Potatoes are relatively high in protein and are excellent sources

of vitamin A, vitamin C, niacin, thiamine, and riboflavin as well as iron and calcium. The breakout for fruits is similar in terms of contribution to nutrient density.

Before eating or cooking fresh vegetables and fruits, make sure to thoroughly wash them. Leave the skins on or pare them as thinly as possible so that vitamins, minerals, and fiber are preserved. Cooking time should be kept to a minimum so that nutrients are conserved and flavor is retained.

If you follow a plant-based diet and worry that your protein intake might be lacking, you can fill the need with vegetable combinations, according to Wardlaw's

Contemporary Nutrition. Twenty amino acids are the building blocks used to make protein. These play multiple roles in our bodies as components of muscle, bone, skin, and organs. Of the 20, nine are considered "essential." This means that our bodies cannot manufacture them and we must consume them in our daily diets. Complete proteins like meat, poultry, and eggs contain all 20, while most plants are limited to one amino acid. However, if you combine two complimentary plants or plant-based foods, you can get your complete protein mix. Combinations include rice and beans, tofu and vegetables, chickpeas and wheat, peanut butter and whole wheat toast, pinto beans and corn, whole wheat pasta and peas, lentils and rice, or oatmeal and pumpkin seeds.

Those on plant-based diets may also be concerned about their vitamin B12 intake. Most simply take a supplement to satisfy this



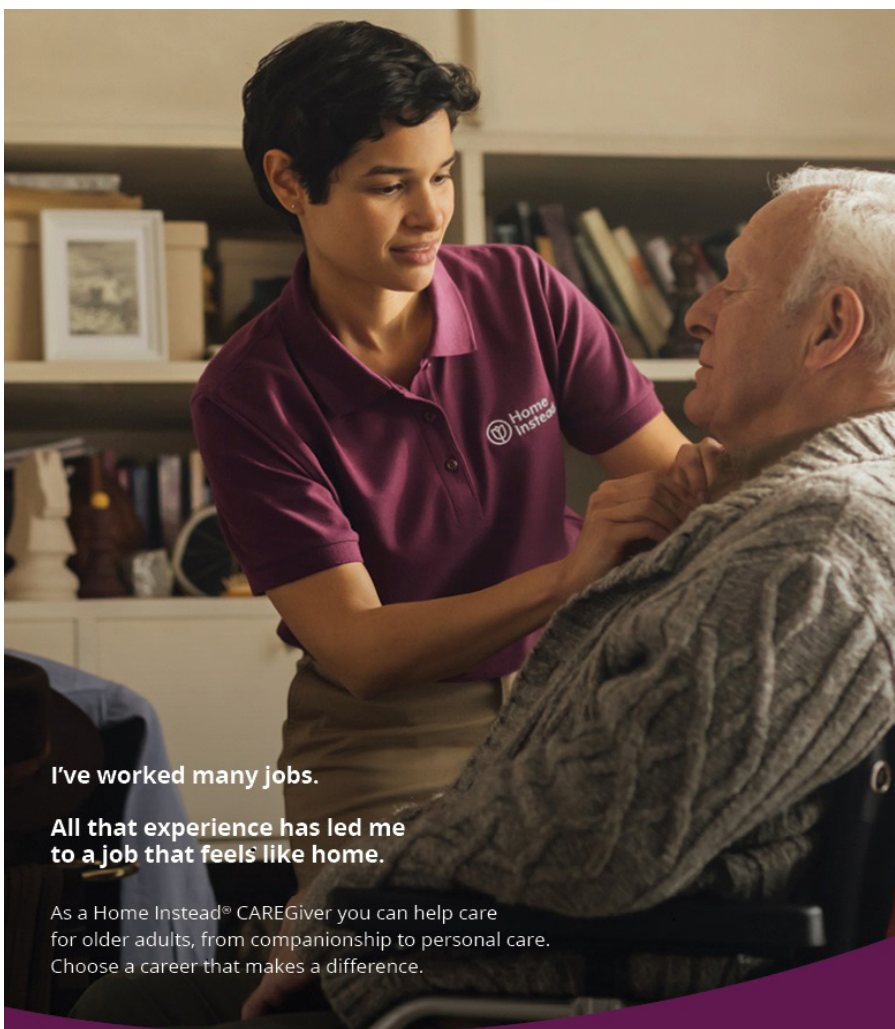
need.

National Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Month also comes with a reminder to cut food waste. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that nearly 40 percent of food waste occurs in the home. Some ways to reduce food waste include adding perishable foods to a casserole, salad, or soup; freezing fresh produce to use at a later time; avoiding the temptation to buy in bulk when items can't be used quickly; preparing fresh produce so that it's easy to grab and go for easy snacks; and composting when food is spoiled.

Simply adding some vegetables and fruits to your weekly shopping is an easy first step to consuming more. Check out some recipes on



the internet and give it a try. Be sure to also check with your health care provider before making any major changes. Finally, incorporate changes slowly; adapting new habits takes time.



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