

Selecting Fruits and Vegetables for Good Health

Today's grocery stores and neighborhood produce stands offer an attractive array of fruits and vegetables. Becoming produce savvy and learning to be selective will help you make good choices.

Timing is everything

Purchase your fruits and vegetables twice a week to assure you get the freshest available. Vegetables and fruits lose nutrients the longer they sit around — especially vitamins A and C. If something is on sale, ask the produce manager how long it's been in the store. Sometimes fruits or vegetables are marked down because they've been unrefrigerated for several days or are damaged.

If you're buying produce to eat today, buy ripe. For tomorrow or the next day, look for items that need just a little ripening. If you don't plan to use them until later in the week, buy fruits and vegetables that aren't yet ripe. (You can ripen fruit more quickly by putting it in a loosely closed paper bag at room temperature.)

Shopping tips

Here are a few things to consider when you shop:

- *Choose bright-colored fruits and vegetables.* The darker they are,

the more nutrients they contain. A small, pale carrot, for example, will have less vitamin A than a mature, bright orange one.

- *Avoid less than perfect produce.*

Bruised or wilted items have probably been mishandled or left around too long.

- *Think small.* Smaller fruit is often sweeter than larger pieces.
- *Select berries and cherries yourself.* Prewrapped packages don't let you see any mold or bruises.
- *Weigh the decision.* Fruits and vegetables with high water content (citrus, pineapple, eggplant, squash, tomatoes, bell peppers) should feel heavy for their size.

What's in a label?

Organic agriculture is grown through natural processes without synthetic pesticides or fertilizers. It usually costs 20%-50% more because it's more labor intensive and the supply is limited. Organic is better for the environment because it replenishes the soil and protects the water supply. But an organic

label doesn't guarantee the produce is fresher or more nutritious.

Prewashed greens are sold in prepackaged bags. They're a great time saver because the greens come pre-torn in bite-size pieces. Despite the label, you should still thoroughly wash these greens in cold water, especially if you plan to eat them raw.

Colorize your kitchen

Frozen and canned fruits and vegetables are always good to have on hand especially when there's no time to stop by the market. Stock your kitchen with these colorful selections.

Frozen Stock

Peas, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, broccoli, corn, spinach, and natural fruit bars.

Cupboard Color

Marinara sauce, tomato juice, dried fruit, sun-dried tomatoes, tomato paste, canned peaches, canned pineapple, apple sauce, and pumpkin.

