

FRUIT FOCUS



By Esti Asher, MS, RDN, LD

High in fiber, water, antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals, fruit is an essential part of a generally healthy and well-balanced diet. While a crisp, fresh piece of fruit is delicious enough, below are seven additional suggestions for incorporating fruit into your meal this Tu B'Shevat (and all year round)!



Oatmeal

Whether incorporating into cold, refreshing overnight oats or wholesome hot oatmeal, adding fruit is a great way to add natural sweetness and additional nutrition. Some suggestions of fruit to include are bananas, berries, and apples.



Fruit skewers

Fun for kids and adults, fruit skewer assembly can be an exciting and productive activity (think fine-motor skills and patterns). The final product also can be used as a beautiful and edible centerpiece. As with all of these suggestions, the fruit choices can be customized to taste preferences and what's in season.



Yogurt parfaits

One of our most popular (read: easy) Thursday night dinners is a yogurt parfait bar! This assemble-it-yourself option is a fun and delicious way to focus on fruit. I find it most enjoyable when each child gets their own portion of yogurt with a few options of cut-up fruit in the middle of the table to choose from—each child can decide which fruit and how much they'd like to add to their individual yogurt!



Muffins/baked goods

There are many ways to include fruit within baked foods. For example, applesauce can be used as an oil substitute. Also, dried (or frozen) fruit can be included to give an additional bite, chewy texture, and sweetness or tart flavor, depending on the fruit variety.



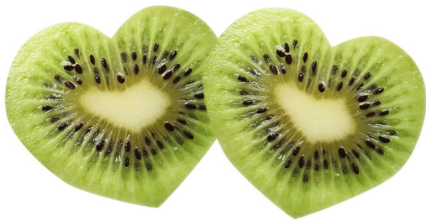
Smoothies

More popular in the warmer months, but a favorite all year round, smoothies are an excellent way to add fruit into our diet. For a basic smoothie, simply add fresh or frozen fruit of your choice into a blender, with a base such as yogurt, milk, or water. (Check out Tidbits from issue 65 for more smoothie tips!)



Within a green salad

We often hear about “fruit salads,” but what about just throwing fruit into our lettuce/greens-based salad? Tossing cut-up fruit into a salad can offer an unexpected additional sweetness, color, and edge to your dish!



Shapes

An exciting and creative way to present fruit is in different unique shapes. You can use a melon-ball scooper for melon and cantaloupe or explore endless possibilities with cookie cutters. Depending on the size of the fruit, you may need to use small cookie-cutter shapes. Examples of fruits that work well for this include watermelon, bananas, and pineapple.

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Including Juice in Baby’s Diet May Increase Health Risks

The way we feed our children may impact their health in the long term. For example, foods offered at a young age (as early as when baby starts eating solids) may impact a child’s taste preferences and food choices later in childhood. Therefore, the eating habits we encourage and the foods and drinks we offer to our babies (and all children) should be with awareness.

A recent study published in *Journal of Nutrition* highlights the notion that the drinks offered in infancy may affect the drink consumption of the child as they get older. The study collected data from over 4,000 mothers to determine the impact of offering juice to their babies. The study, based on questionnaires, found that 25% of mothers offered juice to their baby before the age of 6 months, 49% offered juice between the ages of 6–12 months, and 26% offered juice after 12 months. (The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that fruit juice should not be introduced into an infant’s diet until he or she is at least one year old, if at all.) The study concluded that introducing juice at an earlier age was associated with an increase of juice and sugar-sweetened beverage consumption during childhood. Concerns of consuming these beverages include an increased risk of dental caries and obesity, among others.

Mediterranean Diet and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction to Prevent SGA

A baby’s small size for gestational age (SGA) at birth has been associated with both the nutritional status of the mother and her stress levels during pregnancy. A recent study published in *Journal of the American Medical Association* investigated how a Mediterranean diet and mindfulness-based stress-reduction program would impact women who were high risk for having babies born SGA. The study defined small for gestational age as birth weight below the tenth percentile.

Both the group who received nutrition education on the Mediterranean diet (provided with free extra virgin olive oil and walnuts) and the group who received support for stress reduction experienced decreased incidences of their babies being born SGA. The Mediterranean diet includes an emphasis on fruits, vegetables, healthy fats, and whole grains. While the researchers share that these findings are preliminary and more research should be done, it is an additional reminder of the benefits of reducing stress levels and making healthy and well-balanced food choices during pregnancy (and throughout the lifecycle). ♡