

7 Top Hydrating Fruits and Vegetables

By Esti Asher, MS, RDN, LD

Hydration especially concerns us in the summer months, whether we're preparing for (or recovering from) a fast or trying to keep ourselves well-hydrated during this high-temperature season. Staying hydrated can be accomplished through both drinking water and eating water-rich foods such as fruits and vegetables. I recommend washing (and if you're extra ambitious, cutting up) your produce in advance so it's easily available and ready-to-eat. Having a cold, crisp, pre-washed and ready to eat vegetable (for easy salad assembly) or piece of fruit available in your fridge is a sure way to nourish and hydrate the body.

The following are seven top summer fruits and vegetables that can help with hydration.



Watermelon

While eating refreshing, hydrating, and quenching watermelon recently, my children and I discussed what a special gift it is from Hashem, particularly during the summer months. A one-cup serving of watermelon provides around a half a cup of water, in addition to many other nutrients such as vitamin C, vitamin A, water, and antioxidants such as lycopene.



Cucumbers

One of the first vegetables that comes to mind when we think about hydration, cucumbers are almost entirely made up of water. They are also a source of vitamin K, potassium, and magnesium. Since they are easy to hold, dip, and munch on, and have a mild flavor, cucumbers are often a beloved (or at least tolerated) component of kids' produce intake.



Cantaloupe

This sweet summer fruit is rich in vitamin A and fiber and provides more than a half cup of water in a one-cup serving. Besides for the typical smoothie or yogurt add-in, cantaloupe can be implemented in creative ways, such as in a cold soup or within salads.



Peaches

Water makes up close to 90 percent of peaches, making them particularly refreshing, juicy, and hydrating. They are also rich in potassium and vitamin A, vitamin C, and B vitamins.



Bell Peppers

Approximately 90 percent of the weight of a bell pepper is due to its water content. Rich in carotenoid antioxidants (think cancer prevention and eye health promotion), potassium, and vitamin C, including bell peppers within your summer meals and snacks may be particularly hydrating and beneficial to your health.



Tomatoes

One medium tomato provides approximately a half cup of water. Another well-known health benefit of tomatoes is their high level of lycopene. Studies have shown that this antioxidant helps protect skin sun damage.



Mangos

Our family's all-time favorite fruit, mangos have a high water content, taste like summer, and have an incredible nutrient profile. Mangos have a very high level of vitamin C, in addition to containing other nutrients such as copper, folate, vitamins A, B6, A, E, and K, among others. A fun and creative way to incorporate mango into your summer is to include it within a refreshing homemade salsa.

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Increased protein intake may lead to healthier food choices

A recent study from Rutgers University suggests that a slight increase in protein within an individual's diet may lead to healthier food choices. Data was collected from more than 200 men and women who participated in clinical trials at Rutgers. Trials took place over the past 20 years and were funded by the National Institutes of Health. Participants were between the ages of 24 and 75. Participants were encouraged to consume 18 percent of their calories from protein sources such as poultry, fish, dairy, legumes, and unprocessed red meat. They were also advised to eat fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, while eating refined grains, sugar, salt, and saturated fats was discouraged. Detailed food records allowed researchers to identify and analyze the foods eaten by participants.

After conducting a food journal analysis, researchers subsequently divided participants into two groups: those whose protein consumption was 18 percent of their overall calories and those whose protein consumption was 20 percent of their overall calories. Several benefits were discovered among participants in the latter category. They ate an increased amount of green vegetables, reduced the amount of added sugar and refined grains they ate, and maintained more of their lean muscle mass even throughout weight loss.

Highly processed foods correlated with lower fitness levels in children

While "everything in moderation" is an important concept, and there is a time and place for most foods, it is also important to recognize the consequences of feeding ourselves and our children foods that are low in nutrients. Often, the more processed a food is, the less nutritional value it contains. Examples of ultra-processed foods include packaged snacks, candy, soda, canned soups, sweetened juices, and commercially prepared foods such as burgers, chicken nuggets, and hot dogs.

A study published in American Society for Nutrition examined the association between physical fitness and ultra-processed foods during different stages of childhood. Data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) National Youth Fitness Survey was analyzed. Interestingly, children aged five years and younger with the lowest locomotor development scores (indicating physical fitness level) ate 273 calories more per day of ultra-processed foods than children with the highest scores of locomotor development. Moreover, among older children, researchers used cardiovascular fitness as a physical fitness measure. Teenagers and preteens with good cardiovascular fitness ate 226 calories less each day from ultra-processed foods compared to those who did not have a healthy level of cardiovascular fitness. This study is a reminder that the foods our children eat not only affect their habits for the long term, but can also affect their current health status as well. ♡

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