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## **FRUITS AND VEGETABLES, BY POPULAR DEMAND**

*Don't have good fruit and vegetable choices where you eat?  
The National Cancer Institute encourages Americans to  
work for "change in their eating environment" during  
National 5 A Day Week, Sept. 10-16.*

WASHINGTON, DC — While many Americans — nearly 40 percent — know that it's important to eat at five or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day for better overall health, many people find it challenging to meet the goal when they're not preparing their own meals.

According to the National Cancer Institute (NCI), the good news is that consumers have the power to demand wise and healthy food choices whether at school, work, or at a restaurant. NCI's theme for National 5 A Day Week, Sept. 10-16, "Fruits and Vegetables, by Popular Demand" reminds Americans to "seek and demand healthy options" wherever they eat by asking for more fruit and vegetable options.

"It's important that Americans take charge of their own diets and ask for more good fruit and vegetable choices, wherever they're eating," said Gloria Stables, M.S., R.D., director of NCI's 5 A Day program. "Why be passive about what you're given to eat when you have the power to change your own environment? You can speak up for healthy choices. And by eating 5 A Day, you will be making one of the most important decisions you can for overall better health."

Often when dining out, whether it's running to the deli during lunch, stopping by the cafeteria at work or school, or eating at your favorite restaurant, your first instinct may be to stick to the menu.

But, if there aren't healthy fruit and vegetable options available, NCI encourages asking for alternatives —

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a green salad or steamed vegetables in place of French fries, for example, or a side plate of fruit for dessert. You may be surprised at how receptive people will be towards the healthy requests you make. As the saying goes . . .it can't hurt to ask.

NCI has developed some tips to help consumers advocate for more fruits and vegetables in various eating environments:

### **At your favorite restaurants:**

- **Ask** the manager to expand the menu to include more fruits and vegetables.
- **Ask** the manager to allow customers to choose alternative side dishes to chips and fries, such as fruit salad or lightly marinated cold vegetables.
- **Ask** for fruit and vegetable substitutes or unique dishes — just because it's not on the menu doesn't mean it's not in the kitchen.
- **Make** a point of telling chefs or restaurant managers that you appreciate their efforts when working off the menu for you.
- **Encourage** your friends to patronize restaurants willing to go out of their way to serve more fruits and vegetables

### **At school/work:**

- **Suggest** to your teachers or management that your school or workplace hold a "5 A Day Challenge" contest during 5 A Day Week, encouraging everyone eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day. Those who eat at least 5 A Day can be eligible for a prize or put in a lottery.
- **Suggest** that people bring a recipe or a snack to share that features a creative way to eat more fruits and vegetables.
- **Create** a healthy fruit or vegetable recipe when asked to "bring a dish" for a group function.
- **Tell** your school/work foodservice director that you want more healthy options in the vending machines. Pass up the high-fat items in the machines and opt for low-fat choices like an apple, raisins, or 100 percent fruit juice.

### **At home:**

- **Stock up** by filling your shelves with canned and dried fruits and vegetables, your freezer with frozen fruits and vegetables, and your refrigerator with fresh fruits and vegetables.
- **Keep** fruits and vegetables visible — put them on the top refrigerator shelf, and display them on the counter or kitchen table.
- **Experiment** by picking out a new type of fruit or vegetable every time you go to the store.
- **Savor** the season — enjoy the availability and often more reasonable prices of in-season produce; try farmers markets or roadside stands.

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## **The Effects of Environmental Change**

*Throughout the country, the National Cancer Institute works with community health professionals to promote eating at least five or more daily servings of fruits and vegetables. These grassroots efforts show that when more fruits and vegetables are available, people choose them.*

For example, in 1995-1996, the Dana Farber Cancer Institute in Boston conducted 5 A Day programs in 22 worksites throughout eastern Massachusetts — educating workers on why 5 A Day is an important choice, and making more fruits and vegetables available at company functions and meetings, in vending machines, and at cafeterias.

The programs raised the average person's consumption of fruit and vegetables. Why? Because, the Institute said, when the eating environment and social norms change, people are more willing to change their individual behavior. In other words, if fruits and vegetables are easy to find and the health reasons for eating them are clear, people will often choose them over other options.

As another example, the Minnesota Department of Health developed and implemented the "5 A Day Power Plus Program" during 1995-96 in 23 St. Paul public schools where 60 percent of students receive free or reduced school lunch. The program offered more fruits and vegetables in school cafeterias, educated students about eating 5 A Day, and involved parents.

As part of the education process, the program offered skill-building and problem-solving activities designed to give children the skills they need to ask for and choose fruits and vegetables in school or at home.

By giving students the tools for ask for 5 A Day and making them more available, the program worked — it raised the average lunchtime fruit consumption and combined fruit and vegetable consumption.

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**What's a Serving?**

All varieties of fruits and vegetables — fresh, frozen, canned, dried, and 100% juice — count toward 5 A Day, and a serving is smaller than many people think. One serving can be a medium piece of fruit; ½ cup of cooked, canned, or cut-up vegetables or fruit; a cup of chopped lettuce and other raw leafy vegetables; ¾ cup (6 oz.) of 100-percent fruit or vegetable juice; ½ cup of canned legumes (beans and peas); or ¼ cup dried fruit.

For information on nutrition and cancer, consumers can call NCI's Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER, or visit [www.5aday.gov](http://www.5aday.gov). NCI has many recipes on the web site.

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**Media:** For more information about the Massachusetts and Minnesota 5 A Day programs described, as well as others, please call the NCI Press Office or the Office of Cancer Communications.