

How easy is it to get 10-a-day?



So, just when you thought you were managing to eat your 5-a-day, new research by [Imperial College London](#) shows that we should be eating 10-a-day to get the best benefits for our health. Evidence shows that eating fruits and vegetables can help to protect against diseases such as heart disease and cancer. The benefits of these plant foods lie in their high fibre content as well as the vitamins, minerals and other plant compounds they contain.

#### ***What makes fruits and vegetables so beneficial for health?***

As well as vitamins and minerals that are essential for life, fruits and vegetables also contain a good source of fibre, which is lacking in the average UK diet. Fruits and vegetables also contain phytonutrients, which are not essential to life but have an added health benefit. These plant compounds are responsible for their bright colours and act as antioxidants in the body that help to reduce inflammation and the damage caused by excess free radicals that can build up because of a poor diet, environmental factors and stress. Such compounds include beta carotene (found in orange and green varieties), anthocyanins (found in blue and purple varieties) and lycopene (found in red varieties). Certain phytonutrients have also been linked to specific conditions such as lutein and zeaxanthin (found in yellow and green vegetables), which

have been shown by [research](#) to help protect against age related macular degeneration (leading cause of blindness in older people).

The other significant factor here is that if you're eating 10-a-day then the chances are you have a very healthy diet, which of course will protect you against diseases as well as help you maintain a healthy weight (a risk factor for many diseases).

### **How much do we currently eat?**

The last [National Diet and Nutrition Survey](#) (NDNS 2016) showed that the average intake of fruits and vegetables is 4 serving per day. If you take fruit out of the equation, then this drops to 3.4 servings per day. On average, it seems that only 27% of adults manage to eat 5-a-day.

The key benefits lie in vegetable intake so it's this that we need to focus on to glean the greatest benefit to health.

### **So what counts?**

A serving of fruits and vegetables is 80g (40g of dried fruit). All fruits and vegetables count and some portions may be heavier than 80g such as a whole pepper (160g) or half an aubergine (150g). Smoothies are classed as 2 servings and juices as 1 serving but only once in the day. A single portion of pulses and beans (even baked beans!) are classed as 1 serving but only once in the day. Cook-in-sauces can also count if they're tomato-based so if you chuck in a few handfuls of frozen peas to your pasta sauce you're already getting 2 servings.

### **Is 10-a day completely unachievable?**

Absolutely not! You could even be eating more than you think. In relation to the 5-a-day guidance, the [NHS](#) says, "evidence shows that there are significant health benefits to getting at least five 80g portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day. That's five portions of fruit and veg in total, not five portions of each." So, the new 10-a-day goal is 800g of fruit and vegetables not necessarily 10 individual servings of each, although including lots of different varieties can mean a wider range of nutrients.

This may help to ease the daunting thought of 10-a-day as composite dishes add up. A simple chilli could in fact provide you with 2-3 servings when you count the canned tomatoes, red kidney beans, peppers,

onions and garlic. Serve with guacamole or a tomato salad and you could get as much as 4 servings in one meal.

Some people may feel that cost is an issue but frozen vegetables can provide a cheaper way to add these foods to your diet. Canned pulses are also a cheap way to add a serving of vegetables as well as bulking out meals and adding protein and key minerals such as iron, calcium and zinc. to your diet. You can also source cheaper vegetables from local markets and buying in season helps as well.

### **Top ten tips to achieving 10-a-day**

1. Keep frozen vegetables and canned pulses to hand as they're a quick way to add a serving of vegetables to your dishes. Just remember to grab a few handfuls when you're cooking.
2. Dried fruit makes for a great healthy snack and 40g counts as one of your five-a-day.
3. Get creative with toppings at breakfast by adding fresh or dried fruits to cereal or yoghurt.
4. Toast can either be a breakfast option or a snack and you can add a serving of fruit and vegetables by topping with mashed banana or guacamole (try jazzing this up with lime juice, chillies and spring onions or even a sprinkle of chill powder).
5. Potatoes don't count but sweet potatoes do. Swap them for your usual baked potato or add them roasted and chopped to salads. They also make great dips!
6. If your trying to make a dish go further or reduce your food bill by cutting down on meat then replace half the meat in a recipe with canned lentils, which are a good source of protein and key minerals as well as adding a serving of vegetables to your daily intake.
7. Remember it's the sum weight of the vegetables that count. Homemade soups and stir fries can add as much as 3 servings to your daily intake.
8. Choose vegetables that are the least hassle to prepare. There's no point buying squash and beetroots if you don't know what to do with them and they just end up going off in the fridge. Green beans, Tenderstem broccoli, frozen peas or soya beans are easy to chuck in a pan of boiling water.
9. If you find vegetables boring, then explore cuisines such as Indian that make the most of vegetables by using tasty spices. Dried spices also help to boost your intake of minerals such as iron and have been shown to hold some interesting anti-inflammatory properties.

10. *Get creative! If you have picky eaters, then try blending vegetables before adding to dishes. There are also lots of recipes on the internet that provide inventive ways to add vegetables to dishes such as parsnip muffins or beetroot and chocolate cake.*

*Meeting the new guidance is not as difficult as you think and using the simple tips above can help. Also, try searching the internet for recipe ideas that float your boat using your favourite flavours and cuisines.*

*For more information on how to get more vegetables into your diet go to [NHS choices](#). You will also find lots of recipe ideas at [BBC food](#).*