

By NG KAR FOO and LEE ZHENG YII

OUR mothers knew best when they relentlessly told us to eat more fruits and vegetables when we were young, despite our protests and refusals.

Mum knows that fruits and vegetables are crucial components in our diet that prevent us from falling sick. And how right they are.

However, do you think that you eat enough fruits and vegetables daily? Do you remember how many times you ate fruits and vegetables last week?

The fact is that we are not eating enough fruits and vegetables in our daily life.

According to the Malaysian Adults Nutrition Survey in 2014, most Malaysians do not consume enough fruits and vegetables based on the recommended daily intake of five servings per day.

Fruits and vegetables are indispensable components of our diet that need to be consumed in sufficient amounts for health and well-being.

They play major roles in reducing risk to various diet-related chronic diseases. To prevent diabetes, heart disease and cancers, we must make the effort to consume enough fruits and vegetables daily.

One easy way to make sure that you are able to achieve this target is by remembering the 5-a-day concept.

3V + 2F = 5-A-Day

The Malaysian Dietary Guidelines (MDG) recommend that we should eat at least three servings of vegetables (3V) and two servings of fruits (2F) daily to make up the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables daily.

By remembering 5-a-day, you can keep track of your daily consumption of fruits and vegetables, and ensure that you get enough important nutrients for your body.

The MDG also recommends eating at least one serving of fruits and one serving of vegetables at every main meal.

Also note that a serving of fruits cannot be replaced with a serving of vegetables and vice versa, as both food groups are vital sources of different types of nutrients.

You are also advised to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables based on their colours and types, as different kinds of fruits and vegetables contain different nutrients needed by your body.

Plus, variety in your meal makes it more fun and tasty.

How much is one serving of fruits and vegetables?

A serving of fruit is approximately an 80g portion, or:

- One slice of big-sized fruits like papaya, watermelon, pineapple.

- One piece of medium-sized fruits like banana (e.g. berangan), orange, apple.

- Two pieces of small-sized fruits like banana (emas), kiwi.

- Eight pieces of smaller fruits like grapes or berries.

For vegetables, one serving of cooked veggies such as spinach, broccoli, carrots or pumpkin, is simply half a cup, while a serving of raw vegetables such as cucumber, lettuce or any type of ulam (local salad), is one cup.

However, there are several exceptions to the general guide.

Dried fruits such as raisins or dates, which are usually higher in sugar content, should be eaten moderately – one serving (about one heaped dessert spoon), is enough.

A cup of 150ml serving of fruit juice or smoothie can be counted as one serving and should be taken moderately.

A healthy high with 5-a-day

Fruits and vegetables are indispensable components of our diet that need to be consumed in sufficient amounts for health and well-being.



Green leafy vegetables like spinach and lettuce are good sources of micronutrients like folate, beta-carotene and iron. — AP

The need to achieve 5-a-day

So, why did our mothers keep telling us to eat fruits and vegetables back when we were young?

It is primarily because of their unique nutritional profile – low in calories, while high in essential nutrients such as vitamins, minerals and dietary fibre, as well as a variety of antioxidants and phytonutrients.

Certainly you can't obtain all those essential nutrients from one single fruit or vegetable.

This is because different fruits and vegetables contain different types and amounts of these nutrients.

The different forms and colours of fruits and vegetables reflect the variety of nutrients contained in them.

The variety of micronutrients, dietary fibre and phytonutrients contained in fruits and vegetables play major roles in various metabolic processes in our body.

Various studies have also shown that regular and adequate consumption of fruits and vegetables play crucial roles in the prevention of various diet-related non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, cancer and obesity.

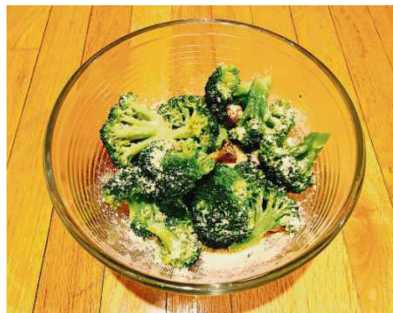
For example, green leafy vegetables like spinach and lettuce, are good sources of micronutrients like folate, beta-carotene and iron.

Meanwhile, cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli and cabbage, are rich in phytonutrients like dithiolethiones and isothiocyanates.

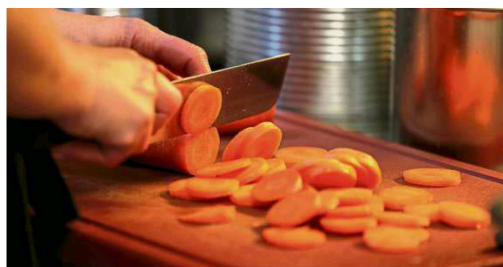
Also, root vegetables like carrots and turnips, contain micronutrients like beta-carotene, vitamin C and potassium.

Tomatoes, cucumbers and bell peppers are categorised as fruit vegetables and they are rich in folic acid, vitamin C and phytonutrients, like lycopene and capsacin.

Fruits with different colours contain a variety of nutrients, especial-



Cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli and cabbage, are rich in phytonutrients like dithiolethiones and isothiocyanates. — AP



Root vegetables like carrots and turnips, contain micronutrients like beta-carotene, vitamin C and potassium. — Reuters

ly antioxidants and phytonutrients.

Red-purple fruits like apple, dragon fruit, grapes and plums contain anthocyanins and lycopene that can reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases and certain cancers.

On the other hand, yellow-orange fruits like papaya and mangoes contain a range of phytonutrients like beta-carotene and lutein, while white fruits like guava and bananas are rich in flavonoids, vitamin C, potassium and dietary fibre, which are also vital nutrients for our health.

Apart from micronutrients and

phytonutrients, fruits and vegetables are also rich sources of dietary fibre that aid in digestion and maintain a healthy gut.

Ways to get your 5-a-day

Three servings of vegetables and two servings of fruits may seem a lot if you are not used to eating fruits and vegetables regularly.

You can take it one step at a time and follow a few simple tips to incorporate fruits and vegetables in your daily diet.

For example, you can:

- Add raisins or slices of banana

into your breakfast cereal or yoghurt.

- Have a vegetable side dish together with your main dish during lunch and dinner.

- Replace your regular snack with easy-to-eat fruits and vegetables like apples or cherry tomatoes.

- Make it easy to access snack-size fruits and vegetables in your fridge or on the dining table.

You can consider frozen or canned fruits and vegetables to add to your dish if fresh ones are not available.

However, make sure that you use canned fruits and vegetables that are preserved in juice or water, instead of in syrup or salt solution.

Clearly, there are various other approaches that you can adopt in order to get enough fruits and vegetables for your nutritional needs.

To encourage your kids to eat more fruits and vegetables, try make your dish more attractive and appetising by combining a variety of fruits and/or vegetables with different colours and shapes.

It is clear that fruits and vegetables are lacking in the daily diet of most Malaysians. Hence, make use of the 5-a-day guide to help you plan and increase your intake of fruits and vegetables.

From today onwards, listen to your mum, influence your loved ones, and together, eat the daily recommended portion of fruits and vegetables.

Ng Kar Foo and Lee Zheng Yii are council members of the Malaysian Dietitians' Association (MDA). This article is contributed by Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) 2018, an annual community nutrition education initiative jointly organised by Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM), MDA and the Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity (MASO). To obtain more information on healthy eating and active lifestyle, visit www.nutritionmonthmalaysia.org.my or the NMM Facebook page.