

HEALTH

Five-a-day fruit and veg 'may not be enough'

By Chris Green

Eating seven or more portions of fruit and vegetables a day gives people a far greater chance of avoiding an early death, according to a study out today which suggests that the Government's official "five a day" recommendation should be doubled to 10.

Eating seven fruit and vegetable helpings a day reduced a person's risk of dying of cancer by 25 per cent, and of heart disease by 31 per cent, the researchers found. But in a surprising finding, eating tinned and frozen fruit appeared to increase the risk.

Current NHS guidance, which is based on advice from the World Health Organisation, states that every person in Britain should try to have five 80g portions of different fruit and vegetables a day.

Examining the eating habits of 65,000 people in England between 2001 and 2013, the researchers from University College London (UCL) found that people who ate seven or more portions daily had a 42 per cent reduced risk of death overall compared with those who managed just one.

Fresh vegetables were found to have the strongest protective effect, followed by salad and then fruit. Overall, vegetables pack more of a protective punch than fruit, the authors said.

However, the research also found that eating tinned and frozen fruit increased a person's risk of death by

17 per cent – which could be due to the high sugar levels.

The study was published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. In an accompanying editorial, public health doctors from the University of Liverpool said the findings prompted the question: "Is it perhaps now time for the UK to update the 'five a day' message to '10 a day'?"

The doctors added that as a maximum recommended daily amount of fruit and vegetables "could not easily be defined", the Government's current five-a-day guide "might provide a false reassurance and risk complacency" among people who already ate that amount. "They need to aim higher," they said.

"We all know that eating fruit and vegetables is healthy, but the size of the effect is staggering," said the study's lead author, Dr Oyinola Oyebode, of UCL's Department of Epidemiology and Public Health. "The clear message here is that the more fruit and vegetables you eat, the less likely you are to die at any age."

The research suggested that vegetables are more effective at warding off an early death than fruit.

i In Australia, official health advice encourages people to eat **two helpings of fruit and five portions of vegetables** a day.

Comment

Stick to unprocessed foods, and don't skimp on vegetables

Jo Travers



This study recommending seven or more portions of fruit and vegetables a day is not a surprise. Both contain vitamins and minerals that are needed for every process in the body; they have fibre which is filling and beneficial for gut health and fluid which prevents dehydration; and if you eat a lot of fruit and veg, you have less room to eat less healthy foods.

Three-quarters of the population are already not meeting the current recommendations which don't discriminate against fresh or processed fruit and I wonder if the public will see more prescriptive guidelines as utterly unachievable and become completely apathetic.

The suggestion that vegetables

may be more protective of health than fruit is interesting. As a dietician, I come across plenty of barriers to eating five a day and preparation is probably the main one. People can often agree to have a bit of fruit that they can take straight from a bowl on their desk but as soon as there's any time element – as with chopping or cooking – people are far less inclined to change their eating behaviours.

There is a lot of new information coming through about the effect of sugar on health and of course fruit is generally sweeter than vegetables, so has more sugar. A whole fruit, unprocessed, still contains the fibre and water you need, but once you start cooking or drying or canning it in syrup, the sugar content tends to rise. A good rule to follow is to eat mostly unprocessed food and fill half your plate with a variety of vegetables at each meal.

The author is a nutritionist and registered dietician based in London

Vital statistics



25% Lower risk of death from cancer with seven daily portions of fruit and vegetables

31% Reduction in risk of death from heart disease thanks to eating seven a day

17% increase in risk of death from eating frozen or canned fruit
SOURCE: UCL



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