



eat the rainbow

Consuming a spectrum of colourful fruits and vegetables is vital for your health, writes **Elli Jacobs**.

Want to get through the Christmas period without ending up with a belly to rival Santa's? While it's near impossible to avoid naughty food at this time of year, there is a simple trick to help you eat healthier now and beyond: eat the rainbow. No, this doesn't mean finding a leprechaun as a dinner companion, it's about consuming a more "colourful" diet.

As Trudy Williams, dietitian at [online nutrition portal Foodtalk](#), explains, "The understanding behind rainbow eating is that foods consumed aren't synthetic, manufactured items or dull-coloured foundation foods such as grains, legumes and meats. Rather they're a colourful mix of fresh fruits and vegetables."

So what benefits does a multi-coloured diet offer? Says Williams,

"These naturally occurring colours in plant foods indicate the presence of phytonutrients – a plant's inbuilt health protection system that naturally protects us in similar ways.

"By eating a colourful range of fresh produce regularly, these phytonutrients work with the cluster of vitamins, minerals and fibre found in fruits and vegetables to benefit our health."

As therapeutic agents, phytonutrients play a preventative role by maintaining our immune function. They also have a medicinal effect, helping to reduce inflammation and the risk of cancer while playing a part in bone density retention and heart protection.

Kate Spina, nutritionist at The Well health centre in Sydney's Bondi, says, "A daily selection of colourful plant foods also offers a wider selection for those who are influenced by the health halo of only greens."

Adds Williams, "In turn, it delivers a solid nutrition start for kids and adults who struggle to eat the minimum recommended amount of fruits and vegetables, as colour encourages variety."

Here are some of the best colour fruit and vegetables for good living.

COLOUR ME HEALTHY

Red The powerful antioxidant lycopene, which gives red produce their colour, is linked with better heart health and reduced cancer risk, especially prostate cancer. "For maximum benefits, eat them cooked, such as hot tomato sauces or roasted capsicums," says Spina. "This makes lycopene more easily absorbed by the body and increases its healing capacity."

Contained in: tomatoes, red capsicum, cherries, red apples, watermelon.

Orange "Rich in vitamin-C and carotenoids like beta-carotene, the orange pigments that convert into vitamin A in our bodies, benefit our eyesight, immune system, skin health and bone integrity," says Spina.

Contained in: carrots, sweet potatoes, rockmelon, mangoes, corn, oranges.

Purple "The rich content of phytonutrients, notably anthocyanins, in purple and blue vegetables and fruits seem to prevent cardiovascular disease and improve cognitive function," says Spina. One US study found compounds in purple potatoes may help kill colon cancer stem cells and limit the spread of the cancer.

Contained in: red grapes, red cabbage, berries, eggplant, plums, blood oranges, beetroot, pomegranates.

Green Green foods are powerhouses of health. "Chlorophyll, which gives green foods their vibrant hue, reduces the risk of cancer," says Spina.

Cruciferous vegetables, like broccoli, promote intestinal immune function. In turn, the richness in vitamin K, lutein and folate mostly present in green leafy vegies act on the brain to keep it healthy and slow down cognitive decline.

Contained in: broccoli, spinach, kale, green cabbage, green apples, asparagus, peas, cucumbers, zucchini.

White The pigment compound quercetin in white foods help reduce the risk of heart disease and inhibit inflammation and allergy symptoms, while allicin found in garlic has antiviral and antibacterial properties which are beneficial to the heart.

Contained in: onions, garlic, leeks, fennel, mushrooms.



MY DAY ON A PLATE

Candice Warner
Athlete, 33

6.30am As soon as I wake up, I have one lemon squeezed into a glass of warm water.

8.30am My breakfast is smashed avocado on toast with tomato and two poached eggs, accompanied by a green tea.

11.15am After a two-hour gym training session, I fuel my body with a banana.

12.30pm Lunch is a salad of chicken and greens and a bottle of water.

2.30pm I snack on a protein bar and a cup of strawberries and blueberries. It is also time for another green tea.

6pm Following my afternoon meetings with architects for our home renovations and park time with my two girls after picking them up from day care, dinner is steak, chips and vegetables.

8pm My daughters are in bed, so I treat myself to a small bowl of ice-cream and green tea.

Dr Joanna McMillan says:

Top marks for... Drinking a few cups of green tea in your day. It is a rich source of antioxidants and has been shown to have several protective health benefits. Just be careful having it too late at night as it does contain some caffeine and could disrupt your sleep.

If you keep eating like this you'll... Meet your nutrient requirements nicely. You just need to make sure you get enough fibre to fuel a diverse microbiome and healthy fats.

Why don't you try... Opt for wholegrain toast and keep the skin on the potatoes for the chips, for more fibre. Use extra virgin olive oil for frying your chips and when making your salad dressing, and include a handful of nuts every day.