

Fresh Fruit: Sweet, Colorful Nutrition

We all know that fruits are good for us – and, luckily, most of us don't have to force ourselves to eat them. In fact, if you're like me, you can't get enough. However, if you're even more like me, you're not quite sure of the individual benefits of specific fruits. Yes, bananas are packed with potassium, pomegranates carry a load of antioxidants... but what about the others? We're supposed to have between five and 10 fruit servings per day (depending on whom you ask), yet does it matter if we have 10 apples, 10 bunches of grapes, or 10 peaches? I decided to look into that this month and hopefully provide some insight as to which fruits can boast about being nutrition-packed and which should probably stay quiet.

There are certain minerals and vitamins commonly found in fruit. Minerals include calcium, copper, iron, magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, potassium, selenium, and zinc. **Calcium** increases bone strength. **Copper** helps create hormones and transport oxygen through the body. **Iron** also helps carry oxygen to different parts of the body through red blood cells. **Magnesium** accompanies calcium in keeping bones strong while also promoting functionality of muscles and nerves. **Manganese** is an antioxidant which breaks down amino acids and increases energy. **Phosphorus** helps with energy as well as bone and teeth health. **Potassium**, an electrolyte, helps stabilize blood pressure, thus protecting the heart. **Selenium** is another antioxidant which is shown to be a potent cancer-fighting agent. And **zinc** builds strong immunity and allows the body to heal quickly from wounds.

Vitamins found in fruit include A, the Bs (including folate and niacin), C, E, and K. **Vitamin A** promotes eye health and a strong immune system as well as keeps the skin healthy. **B vitamins** increase energy, promote functionality of the nervous system, and help keep our hair, skin, and eyes healthy. **Vitamin C** (ascorbic acid) is a free-radical-fighting antioxidant. **Vitamin D** helps the body absorb calcium and therefore helps bone health. **Vitamin E** is another antioxidant which also benefits the red blood cells. And **vitamin K** helps regulate blood clotting and promotes bone metabolism.

Now that we know the benefits and functions of the vitamins and minerals that fruits provide, let's explore which fruits yield which benefits.

Apples are high in potassium, as are **apricots**, which also contain a significant

amount of phosphorus, iron, selenium, and vitamin A. **Bananas** are of course high in potassium (at about 500mg each, they are on the top of the potassium list), but they are also good sources of magnesium, phosphorus, selenium, and a decent source of folate and niacin.

Kiwis contain even more potassium than bananas (in a cup) and are also packed with phosphorus, magnesium, calcium, selenium, copper, vitamin A, vitamin C, folate, vitamin B2, niacin, and vitamin E. Who knew kiwis were the wonder fruit?

Cantaloupe provides potassium and a whopping amount of vitamin A. Another vitamin-A-rich fruit is the mango. **Mangos** also contain folate, niacin, B6, vitamin E, and potassium. **Watermelons** can also boast about being vitamin A providers as well as containing a high level of potassium and some magnesium, vitamin C, and B1.

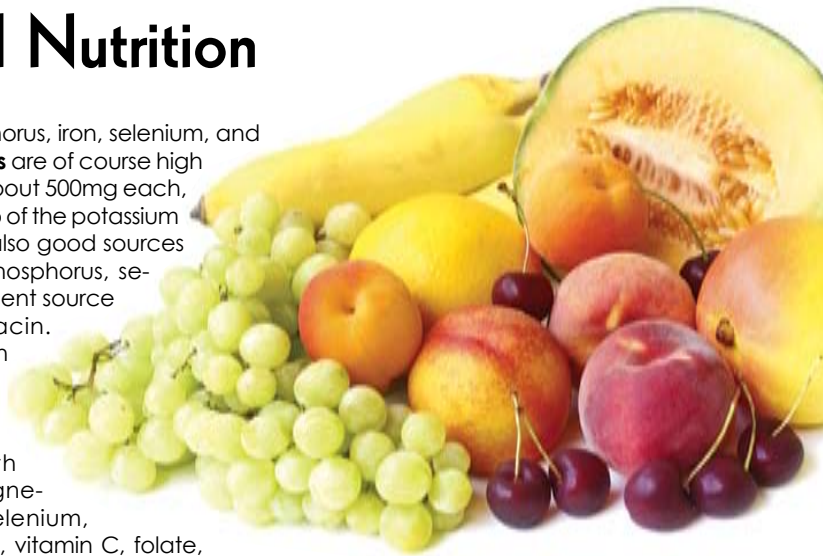
Oranges are of course known as the vitamin C fruits, but they also provide consumers with calcium, potassium, selenium, vitamin A, folate, and B1 (thiamine). **Strawberries** offer manganese, potassium, selenium, and more vitamin C (in a cup) than in an orange.

Cherries contain phosphorus, potassium, selenium, and some vitamin A. **Pineapple** is an excellent source of magnesium and also provides potassium, B1, and B6. **Pomegranates**, known for their antioxidant value, are also providers of magnesium, copper, zinc, and B1.

Peaches are on the lower end of the nutrition-packed fruits with just a little potassium, selenium, vitamin A, folate, and niacin, as are **pears**, containing some potassium and phosphorus. **Blackberries** offer potassium, phosphorus, manganese, selenium, vitamin A, and folate. **Grapes** are a good source of potassium and selenium.

A fresh **guava** is one of the most nutritious fruits and is high in vitamin C, vitamin A, folate, potassium, copper, and manganese. Papayas are another super fruit, packed with vitamin A, C, E, K, and folate. And finally, **grapefruits** are a great source of vitamin C, folate, and potassium.

Of course, there are other fruits out there, but this is a sampling of the more common fruits as well as a few others which are tasty and healthy.



So, what to do now? One great way to incorporate a variety of fruits into our daily diet – and thus providing ourselves with a plethora of vitamins and minerals which our bodies desperately need – is to select a variety from our local farmer's market, farm stands, and grocers such as Whole Foods and Publix and create a nutrition-packed fruit salad, perfect for a late morning snack, after-lunch energy boost, or end-of-the-evening dessert.

Add finely chopped fresh mint, a splash of juice (orange, grapefruit, lime, and pomegranate work well), and, if you need more sweetness than the fruits naturally provide, a drizzle of honey or agave nectar. I always include bananas to add creaminess and to cut the tart juiciness of the other fruits. My mother adds a strong twist with kumquat zest. You can also blend your fruit salad with a few spoonfuls of yogurt to make an unbelievable smoothie.

By consuming freshly prepared fruit salads, we can ensure that we're getting all of the vitamins and minerals fruits have to offer. Of course, grabbing an apple and enjoying a bowl of cherries are also great options, but fruit salads can be incredibly satisfying and flavorful dishes. The saying goes that everything good is bad for you, but let me tell you... this one's both delicious and nutritious.

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