

# Edinburgh Community Food wants to know if you are getting your 5-a-day

✘ Contributed by [Edinburgh Community Food](#)

## Getting your 5-A-Day?

This might not come as a surprise to you: fruit and vegetables are good for us and the more we eat the better! Fruit and veg are the only foods to feature in the nutritional guidelines of all major countries and scientists and health practitioners the world over agree that fruit and veg can help lower heart disease, some cancers and keep our bowels healthy. So, we all know that these foods are 'a good thing'.

Here is something else that might not surprise you: we Scots do not eat nearly enough fruit and veg. Most of us these days are familiar with the phrase '5-a-day'. We hear it on telly or from our GPs and we read it in magazines and newspapers. But how many of us actually manage to reach this holy target of five portions a day? According to research average Scottish consumption is 3.2 a day but in the less well-off parts of our nation this sinks to around 2 portions, with plenty of people not managing to eat any at all. Scottish consumption is amongst the lowest in the UK, and the UK is amongst the lowest in Western Europe. No wonder we are the 'sick man of Europe!' But why are they so important?

## Why should we eat fruit and vegetables?

- *They are the best food source of vitamins and some minerals which are vital for your immune system and overall health*
- *They are a great source of fibre which keeps your gut healthy, may lower blood pressure and helps reduce*

*constipation and bowel cancer*

- They help keep your heart healthy, lowering the risk of attacks and strokes*
- They help your skin and hair to look great, healthy and vibrant*
- They are low in fat and are an essential component of a healthy, balanced diet*

But where does this number 'five' come from?

Most of us are aware that NHS and government advice is to get at least five portions a day. This target of five is actually a rather arbitrary number. It was chosen because it was thought that 'five' was a realistic and easily attainable number for most people to reach. It is worth pointing out, however, that our target level is lower than for any other developed country. Have a below to see what other nations are doing:

Denmark 6 a day

France 10 a day

Australia 2 fruit + 5 veg a day\*

Japan 2-4 fruit + 7-13 veg a day\*\*

\*Australia includes potatoes in their targets.

\*\* Japan's portions are slightly smaller than ours.

If you have a look at the Eatwell Plate you can see that our daily diet should include roughly one third carbohydrates and one third fruit and veg. A modest target of five portions doesn't really seem to be enough so don't feel like you have to stop there! The more, the merrier.

5-a-day, but at what cost?

We all know that fresh fruit and vegetables can be expensive. The supermarkets' prices seem to go up daily and trying to ensure a whole family gets their 5-a-day can be tough, especially on a tight budget. However, there is some good news: it's not just fresh produce that counts. All of the following items can also count towards your target (sadly potatoes don't count – they are considered a carbohydrate food in the UK):

1. Dried fruit
2. Frozen fruit and frozen veg
3. Tinned fruit and tinned veg (beware of added sugar or salt)
4. Pulses, e.g. beans, lentils, chickpeas etc. (one portion only)
5. 150ml fruit juice (one portion only and not squash)

Other ways to lower your fruit and vegetables bill include:

1. Buy produce in season (see: <http://eatseasonably.co.uk/what-to-eat-now/calendar/>).
2. Focus on the cheaper items, such as carrots, onions, turnips and cabbage and use them to bulk out meals.
3. Use your local fruit and veg community co-op (<http://www.edinburghcommunityfood.org.uk/what-we-do/co-ops/find-coop>) or order a home delivery from Edinburgh Community Food (<http://www.edinburghcommunityfood.org.uk/buy/order>).
4. Go in with a friend, relative or neighbour for bulk-buy offers

Dried fruit can be very cost-effective. For instance, 500 grams of sultanas are about £1 in most supermarkets – that's a lot of portions! Frozen vegetables in particular can be had

very cheaply and are just as good as fresh! Although slightly dear, smoothies can also count towards your total. Just bear in mind that, as they are basically concentrated fruit, they do contain a lot of sugar.

But what is a 'portion'?

OK, so we've looked at what types of food can contribute towards our 5-a-day but just what exactly is a portion? Roughly put, a portion is 80 grams or about 3 ounces. This is about the same as an adult's handful. It also holds true for children though: they have smaller hands but also smaller bodies so for a child a handful is also a portion. Of course, nothing is ever quite as straightforward as we'd like it to be. Portions of frozen/chopped veg and pulses are counted in tablespoons, juice in millilitres (150ml) and for dried fruit you have to imagine how big it's fresh equivalent would be! As an example three plums makes one portion. This means that three dried plums (prunes) also make one portion. And furthermore, each portion needs to be a different foodstuff. Unfortunately, it's no good simply eating five carrots every day or drinking five glasses of juice. We need to get a balance of nutrients for our health and, as different fruits and vegetables have different nutrients, this means eating a balanced array of fruits and vegetables! Have a look at the table below to get a feeling for what a portion is:

Examples:

*Fruit Juice 150ml (a very small glass)*

*Grapes Handful*

*Raisins 1 tablespoon (=1 handful fresh grapes)*

*Satsuma 2*

*Broccoli 3 florets*

*Apricot 3*

*Dried Apricot 3*

*Plum 3*

*Prune 3*

*Pear 1 medium*  
*Tomato 2 medium*  
*Pepper ½ medium*  
*Carrot 1 medium*  
*Cucumber 5cm/2"*  
*Peas 3 tablespoons*  
*Aubergine ½ medium*  
*Onion 1 medium*  
*Frozen veg 3 tablespoons*  
*Leek 1 medium (white part)*  
*Pulses 3 tablespoons*

Sometimes even reaching 5-a-day can seem like a bit of a challenge and it can be tough changing a lifetime's habits but it really is worth it. It takes just a few simple steps to change our routines and include more portions in our daily lives. Here are a few tips:

- *Have a small (150ml) glass of fruit juice every morning with breakfast or add berries to muesli.*
- *Grab a banana for the journey to work.*
- *Choose fruit for mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks.*
- *Dried fruit makes a great snack for taking out and about.*
- *Go for beans on toast or soup for lunch.*
- *Include frozen vegetables with dinner.*
- *Have tinned fruit for pudding*

Submitted by [Chris Mantle](#)

