

Edinburgh Community Food news – 7-a-day? here's how to do it!

✘ Just how much fruit and veg should we be eating?

5-a-day. 7-a-day. Even 10-a-day? It's well-known that we Scots are not the best at consuming fruit and veg. The mantra of five-a-day has been drummed into us at every turn since it was launched over ten years ago. Is there anyone still unaware that we should be eating five portions of fruit and veg a day? However, despite knowing this even the target of five has been difficult for many of us to reach, with average intakes around 2-3 portions a day. And now it's being said we should aim higher, at seven, or even at ten!

These new targets come from some very good research that followed 65,000 people over roughly 8 years. What the researchers found was quite simple: people who ate more fruit and veg had less chance of dying from cancer and heart disease. One portion a day was much better than none, but seven or more was the best of all. And eating fruit and veg isn't only about cancer and heart disease. These foods also make sure our immune systems are at their best (so we can fight off coughs, cold and infections) and keep our insides and bowels working normally. But what does this new research mean for us? And is seven-a-day affordable? Is it even possible?

First off, we should mention that the recommendation was always 'at least 5-a-day' – something a lot of people may have missed. Five pieces of fruit and veg was always meant to be a minimum, with the idea being that the more we consume, the better. The Food Standards Agency's Eatwell plate – used by schools, the NHS and food & health charities like Edinburgh

Community Food – also suggests the more the merrier. It shows that fruit and veg make up one third of our overall diet. That's a lot of fruit and veg! So the idea of aiming for seven doesn't really contradict what we've all been told so far. Because of this, it's unlikely that government advice will change any time soon. Five portions is still a minimum requirement

So, what can we do? Getting 5-or-more-a-day isn't as hard – nor as expensive – as we may think. The following all count towards our target:

- Fresh fruit and veg
- Frozen fruit and veg
- Dried fruit and veg
- Tinned fruit (avoid those with added sugar or syrup)
- Tinned veg (avoid ones with added salt)
- Pulses such as lentils or beans (one portion only)

(Unfortunately, white potatoes don't count as they are considered a carb rather than vegetable. Sweet potatoes, however, are fine!)

Here are some easy ways to increase our intakes:

- Add chopped fruit to cereal
- Grab a banana on the way to school or work
- Have a small packet of raisins in the mid-morning or get some cheap apples
- Have carrot sticks with hummus for lunch or a bowl of lentil soup, followed by fruit
- Add veg to sandwiches
- Add one or two portions of frozen veg to your dinner, with fruit for pudding

While some fresh fruit may be rather expensive, it is important to note that cheaper alternatives – like bananas, apples, kiwis and pears – are just as good as pricey blueberries and out of season raspberries. A number of discount supermarkets and frozen food specialists stock very reasonably-priced fruit and veg and pretty much all

supermarkets sell affordable long-life tins. Or, you could order a home delivery from Edinburgh Community Food. And in other good news, the researchers also suggest that we should emphasise the cheaper veg rather than the fruit – just like the Australians have been doing all along (five veg, two fruit). Vegetables have more fibre and tend to contain more vitamins and minerals. They are also more filling. British staples such as carrots and onions are always cheap and, with veg like neeps, can be used to bulk out main meals. Frozen options like peas, spinach and green beans are also a really cost-effective alternative and contain just as much nutrition as fresh. Other frozen veg – such as leeks, onions or broccoli – come pre-chopped, are very quick to heat up, last for ages in the freezer and can be simply added to soups, stews and curries. Finally, we can also make use of pulses: the humble lentil or kidney bean (amongst others) are full of great nutrients, very cheap, and can also bulk out meals. Indeed a good home-cooked meal may contain two or even three portions in a single sitting! If we all cook from scratch as much as possible we'll find our fruit and vegetable consumption can't help but go up!

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