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ForLife Nutrition- A nondiet approach to healthy eating.

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What Are Phytochemicals and Why Should I Eat Them?

Phytochemicals are found in plant products and may act as antioxidants in the body. They may also protect and regenerate essential nutrients and can work to deactivate cancer-causing substances. Good sources of phytochemicals are fruits and vegetables. Plant foods that are similar in color tend to be similar in their phytochemical content. By eating fruits and vegetables in a variety of different colors, we can be sure that we are getting a good variety of phytochemicals.

Reds:

Red colored fruits and vegetables contain lycopene, a powerful anti-oxidant that has been associated with a reduced risk of prostate cancer. Examples include tomatoes and tomato products, cranberries, watermelon and pink grapefruit.

Blue and purple:

The antioxidants found in these fruit and vegetables are heart healthy and may help support healthy blood pressure. Examples include eggplant, blackberries, prunes, plums, and blueberries which are considered to have the highest antioxidant activity of all foods.

Green and yellow/green:

Benefits to eating green fruits and vegetables include their ability to help the body get rid of potentially cancer-causing compounds. Examples include broccoli, cabbage and green beans. Yellow/greens such as kiwi are great for healthy eyesight because they are rich in lutein.

Orange/yellow:

These foods can be rich in beta-carotene which is beneficial for good eyesight and immune function. Examples include pumpkin sweet potato, carrots, cantaloupe, and apricots.

Now that you know the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables and a variety of colors, make some changes to your usual choices. The more colors that you can include the better the chance of improving your health. Make a fresh or frozen vegetable mixture including all your favorites. Or try a stirfry. Choosing fruit salad instead of a single type of fruit will increase your variety of phytochemical intake. Mix it up and try something new. Count up the colors each day. How many different colors are you eating?