

# Developing Colorful Eating Habits:

## *Eating Food of Every Color is Good for Your Health*

Delight your kids with bright colors on their plate at every meal. Eating vegetables and fruits that are as colorful as the rainbow – red, orange, yellow, dark green, blue, purple, white and tan – not only looks appealing, but also helps provide us with a variety of nutrients needed for good health. Plants contain essential vitamins and minerals that help our bodies function properly. Plants also contain hundreds of natural chemicals called phytonutrients (“phyto” means *plant* in Greek) that help protect plants from threats like bugs, germs and fungi. When consumed by people, phytonutrients help to protect us from disease and aid in normal bodily functions. Common names for phytonutrients include antioxidants, flavonoids, phytochemicals, carotenoids, and polyphenols.

The color of plants (fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts and seeds) is the result of the phytonutrients and vitamins they contain. Choosing plants rich in color is a great way to select foods high in nutritional value. For example, tomatoes are red because they contain lycopene, a type of phytonutrient. A bright, vibrant-colored tomato contains higher amounts of phytonutrients compared to a duller, lighter-colored tomato. By offering plant-based, whole foods of different color at every meal, you will help ensure your children are receiving adequate nutrients needed for good health.

The theme of this course is developing healthy eating habits in children that include variety and color. Information about nutrients available in plants and associated health benefits of eating colorful plants is included in the following pages according to color (red, orange/yellow, green, blue/purple, white and tan). Tips for increasing the amount of plants in your meal plan and a delicious recipe featuring colorful vegetables are also included at the end of this course.

### **RED**

When you think of red-colored foods, what do you think of? Strawberries maybe? How about watermelon or tomatoes? A wide variety of vegetables and fruits come in shades of red. Plant foods that are red in color contain flavonoids, ellagic acid and lycopene (types of phytonutrients), as well as a variety of vitamins, minerals and fiber. Eating red-colored foods helps support heart health and memory.

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| <b>EXAMPLES OF<br/>RED FOODS</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Apples</li><li>✓ Strawberries</li><li>✓ Cherries</li><li>✓ Watermelon</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Red onion</li><li>✓ Tomatoes</li><li>✓ Red cabbage</li><li>✓ Red bell pepper</li></ul> |
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## ORANGE & YELLOW

Have your children enjoyed yellow or orange foods lately? If so, they most likely ate some amount of beta-carotene, a phytonutrient the body converts to vitamin A. Orange and yellow foods are also usually good sources of vitamin C. Both vitamin A and C have important roles in the body. For example, vitamin A is required for healthy eyes, assists in bone growth, and helps support a healthy immune system so you get sick less often. Vitamin C assists in healing wounds and in protein metabolism. Vitamin C also acts as an antioxidant by fighting free-radicals that increase risk of developing disease or cancer.

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| <b>EXAMPLES OF<br/>ORANGE &amp; YELLOW FOODS</b> | ✓ Sweet potato<br>✓ Carrots<br>✓ Pumpkin<br>✓ Yellow bell pepper | ✓ Cantaloupe<br>✓ Pineapple<br>✓ Peaches<br>✓ Butternut squash |
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## GREEN

When you think about green-colored food, perhaps a variety of vegetables come to mind. Spinach, broccoli, and green beans are a few examples of green vegetables that you might be familiar with. How often do you think of green fruit instead of vegetables? Maybe green-colored fruits do not come to mind as often as green-colored vegetables, but they deserve their spotlight. Honeydew melon, green grapes, and avocado are all examples of green-colored fruit and they are nutritious like their green vegetable counterparts. Dark green foods contain a variety of nutrients like vitamin K, calcium, and phytochemicals such as carotenoids. Lutein and beta-carotene are two kinds of carotenoids found in green-colored foods that promote eye-health, while calcium is needed for strong bones.

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| <b>EXAMPLES OF<br/>GREEN FOODS</b> | ✓ Spinach<br>✓ Broccoli<br>✓ Lettuces<br>✓ Brussels sprouts | ✓ Green grapes<br>✓ Honeydew melon<br>✓ Avocado<br>✓ Kiwifruit |
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## BLUE/PURPLE

Does eating blue or purple-colored food sound weird? Would you eat blueberries or purple grapes? Maybe eating blue and purple foods is not so weird after all. Blue and purple-colored foods contain a variety of vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients needed for optimal health. For instance, blueberries and blackberries contain high amounts of anthocyanins and flavonoids (types of phytonutrients) that help prevent disease, protect memory, maintain proper blood flow, and promote healthy aging.

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| <b>EXAMPLES OF<br/>BLUE/PURPLE FOODS</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Blueberries</li> <li>✓ Blackberries</li> <li>✓ Purple Figs</li> <li>✓ Purple grapes</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Purple cabbage</li> <li>✓ Purple beets</li> <li>✓ Purple potatoes</li> <li>✓ Purple carrots</li> </ul> |
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## WHITE

When someone asks you to think of vegetables, what colors do you imagine? Red or yellow? Green or blue? Beautiful colors, not the lack of, is what often comes to mind when thinking of vegetables and fruits. White-colored foods sometimes get a bad reputation as being high in starch or highly processed and less nutritional. Some white-colored foods do fall in the starch food category, but this is not the only nutritional characteristic of white-colored vegetables. Including a variety of white-colored foods in your child’s diet will help them meet their daily needs for fiber, vitamins, minerals (especially sulfur), and phytonutrients. Eating foods like cauliflower, potatoes, and onions support heart health and good cholesterol levels (5). If you think of white-colored foods less often than rainbow-colored produce, make a point of including white-colored vegetables and fruits in your meal plan.

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| <b>EXAMPLES OF WHITE<br/>FOODS</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Cauliflower</li> <li>✓ Potato</li> <li>✓ Turnip</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Banana</li> <li>✓ White nectarine</li> <li>✓ Brown pear</li> </ul> |
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## TAN

Although the color tan might not be the most exciting in the color spectrum, tan-colored foods offer a variety of health benefits and should be included in your daily meal plan. Tan-colored foods tend to be good sources of fiber, as well as contain different vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients. Whole grains and some vegetable and fruit skins contain soluble fiber, which promotes a healthy digestive track and reduces risk of heart disease. Kiwifruit skins, for example, are excellent sources of fiber and vitamin C. Although often discarded, kiwifruit skins are completely edible and make eating kiwifruit easier by holding the fruit together.

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| <b>EXAMPLES OF TAN<br/>FOODS</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Whole wheat bread</li> <li>✓ Oatmeal</li> <li>✓ Barley</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Kiwifruit skins</li> <li>✓ Spelt</li> <li>✓ Rye</li> </ul> |
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## Growing Healthy Eaters

Imagine a 4-year old boy named Joey. He is in his family’s garden with his sun hat and play clothes on. With a giant grin on his face and a gleam in his eye, Joey stands up and proudly holds up his prize. Looking at his mom he says, “Look mom! A purple carrot!” Seeing her son’s pride

and excitement, she smiles back at him and says, “You found a purple carrot? That’s amazing! Are you going to share it with me and your sister?” Joey nods quickly, says “yes!”, and asks to go show the carrot to his little sister.

If you have never seen children get excited about vegetables, don’t worry, you’re not the only one. Like many caregivers, children in your care have probably had days (or weeks, or months) when trying new foods is the last thing they want to do. Getting children to eat vegetables, any vegetable for that matter, might seem like a miracle.

## **Would you be surprised to hear that growing food with children will likely increase their desire to try new foods?**

Growing food with children is one of the best ways to connect them to the food they eat, and they will likely start looking forward to trying new foods. Involve children in the entire growing process from start to finish. Begin by helping them select a vegetable or fruit that they want to grow and finish the learning circle by encouraging them to harvest their prized vegetable or fruit from the garden (or pot).

Do not be surprised when children start **ASKING** to eat the food they just harvested! Ask children how they want to eat it. If they do not know how to eat the food they picked, help them find a recipe to try. Be adventurous, as you are their role model and one of their best teachers. If you want them to try new foods then you need to show your excitement for trying new foods, too!

Growing food is easier than you might think. So many kinds of vegetables and fruits can grow in small spaces. Do you have a porch that gets sunlight? Try growing lettuce or tomatoes in a large pot. Do you have a garden plot to work with? Grow carrots, beans, or bell peppers!

June and July are good months to plant carrots in Colorado. Did you know that not all carrots are orange? Carrots come in a variety of colors like orange, purple, red, yellow, and white. Plant rainbow-blend carrot seeds in your garden this summer and watch how children become excited like Joey in the story when he pulled a purple carrot from the ground. Who can resist a purple carrot that they grew?

## **Why grow vegetables and fruits at home when time is scarce, and the grocery store is so convenient?**

1. Vegetables and fruits grown at home tend to cost less than store-bought produce.
2. Growing food at home means you will have fresh food at your fingertip ready to incorporate into a variety of tasty meals.
3. Adults and children are more likely to eat vegetables and fruits when they are involved in the growing process.
4. Vegetables and fruits grown and harvested in season have the freshest taste.

5. Growing food with children provides great learning opportunities. The process of growing food involves learning about soil cultivation, planting seeds, nurturing the growing process, and harvesting.
6. Working in the garden is an excellent way to increase daily physical activity.
7. Excess food grown in the garden can be frozen for use later, thereby preventing waste and reducing food cost.

## **Tips for Increasing Vegetables and Fruits in Your Child's Diet**

- Make a goal to offer at least 3 servings of vegetables and 2 servings of fruit each day.
- Fill half the plate with vegetables.
- Have fresh vegetables and fruits rinsed, prepped, and ready for easy-to-grab snacks.
- Add vegetables and fruits to the foods your child enjoys. For example, add tomato and onion to cheese quesadillas.
- Roasting vegetables and fruits enhances their flavor. Try roasting bell peppers, carrots, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, peaches, or mango for starters.
- Offer vegetables and fruits in a variety of ways – raw, in sauces, as toppings, baked into sweet or savory muffins, in soups, in casseroles, etc.
- Chop vegetables into bite-size pieces for snack dippers. Fresh red bell pepper, broccoli, carrots, celery, and cucumbers all taste great raw and pair well with healthy dips like hummus or ranch dip made with Greek yogurt.
- Freeze chopped fruit and seedless grapes.
- Put together a healthy trail mix featuring dried fruit (such as apples, apricots, cranberries, or raisins) and mixed nuts. Add dry cereal, like whole-grain toasted O's, to make the snack mix extra tasty and healthy!
- Use fresh or dried fruit as a topping on salad greens.
- When life gets busy, pull out frozen vegetables to add as side dishes, use as toppings, or include in a vegetable stir-fry with brown rice.
- Allow (a little) play during mealtime. Creating with foods may inspire children to eat them.

## **Bring the Rainbow to Your Table**

- Let children choose a color theme each week. List foods according to color and have color-themed taste-testing events. Add favorites to the shopping list.
- Use a calendar as a food diary. Note featured foods by color on each day of the month.
- Plant colorful vegetables and fruits in your garden.
- Feature homegrown produce in meals.
- Buy fresh produce in season for peak ripeness and nutrients.
- Create weekly meal plans featuring at least one meal with every color of the rainbow.

- Draw a rainbow on a piece of paper before mealtime. Have children help you write down foods they are about to eat on the appropriate color of the rainbow.
- Make a colorful rainbow fruit salad by combining red strawberries, orange cantaloupe, yellow pineapple, green kiwifruit, blueberries and white banana slices.
- Serve rainbow slaw made with red bell pepper, orange carrot, green cilantro, purple cabbage, and white onion (**see credited recipe**).

## Let's Get Cooking with Red Cabbage!

Cabbage is a versatile and hearty vegetable that provides many nutritional benefits. Red cabbage is high in polyphenols, a group of phytonutrients known to have disease-fighting properties. Red cabbage is also high in dietary fiber, low in calories, and is a great source of vitamins and minerals. The amount of vitamin C and anthocyanins (a phytonutrient) is much greater in red cabbage compared to green cabbage, making the red variety good for helping your body deal with inflammation, viruses, and bacteria.

When preparing to cook red cabbage, rinse the head and remove the outer leaves before cutting. Chop, slice, or shred cabbage depending on how you want to cook with it. Many nutrients in red cabbage are water soluble or heat-sensitive. Cooking red cabbage in small amounts of water, if any, as often as possible will reduce the amount of nutrients lost during the cooking process. Use more water when cooking red cabbage if you plan to consume the broth. Sautéing, light steaming, pickling, and serving red cabbage raw are all great ways to make a delicious dish while retaining nutrients.

### **Rainbow Slaw**

#### **Ingredients:**

3 cups red cabbage, shredded  
 3 medium carrots, shredded  
 1 medium onion, diced  
 1 red bell pepper, diced  
 2 Tbsp. fresh cilantro, chopped  
 1/3 cup canola oil  
 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar  
 1 Tbsp. honey  
 1 tsp. chili powder (optional)  
 salt and pepper to taste

#### **Directions:**

1. In a large bowl, toss together the cabbage, carrot, onion, red pepper, and cilantro. Set aside.
2. In a small bowl, whisk together the oil, vinegar, honey, chili powder, salt and pepper. Pour the dressing over the vegetable mixture and toss until all vegetables are coated with dressing. Cover the bowl and refrigerate for at least one hour before serving as a side dish or topping.



#### **CREDITING INFORMATION:**

Recipe serves sixteen 3-5 year olds ½ cup vegetables  
 ➤ ½ cup vegetables = 1 serving

Reference: *Red Cabbage Nutrition Information*, retrieved from [www.livestrong.com](http://www.livestrong.com)



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