

Technical Bulletin #17:

Vitamin C – An Essential Vitamin for Healthy Eating

Why Vitamin C is important?

Vitamin C is needed for the growth and repair of your body. It helps:

- Maintain healthy skin and strong bones, muscles and teeth
- Heal cuts and wounds
- Build resistance to and fight infections
- Absorb the iron you get from other foods

What are easily available sources of Vitamin C?

Many fruits in your garden and local markets are excellent sources of Vitamin C. Some of these are:

- Mango
- Papaya
- Pineapple
- Watermelon
- Orange
- Pomelo
- Star fruit
- Guava
- Lychee
- Longan



Common vegetables you grow in your garden or buy in local markets are also good sources of Vitamin C:

- Dark green leafy vegetables, such as morning glory, kale, mustard greens, taro leaves, and pak choi
- Marroom leaves and pods
- Cauliflower, broccoli, and cabbage
- Green and red sweet peppers
- Chili peppers
- Tomatoes
- Winter melon
- Sweet potatoes





Getting enough Vitamin C in your diet

Your body cannot store Vitamin C. This means you should eat foods that are rich in Vitamin C every day.

- Children should eat at least 2 to 4 servings of different fruits and vegetables every day. One serving equals 125 ml.
- Teenagers and adults should eat 3-5 servings of vegetables and 2-4 servings of fruit every day. One serving of raw leafy vegetables equals 250 ml. One serving of other raw or cooked vegetables and fruits equals 125 ml.
- Pregnant women and lactating mothers need higher levels of Vitamin C.

How to prepare and store fruits and vegetables to keep Vitamin C

The Vitamin C that is found in fruits and vegetables is easily destroyed by heat, light, and exposure to air. The following are recommendations for preserving the nutritional value of fruits and vegetables that are rich in Vitamin C.

- Eating raw fruits and vegetables is the best way to ensure that Vitamin C is not lost.
- Harvest fruits and vegetables or buy them in the market on a daily basis. It is best to use them as soon as possible after they have been picked.
- Store fruits and vegetables in a cool place and take steps to avoid wilting or drying out.
- Don't soak fruits and vegetables in water for a long time. Vitamin C will leach out into the water.
- Cut vegetables into large pieces to cook them. After cooking, cut them into smaller pieces to serve. Cutting them into small pieces before cooking increases the loss of Vitamin C.
- Put vegetables into a small amount of boiling water and cook with the lid on for the shortest time possible. Steaming is another good way to cook vegetables to preserve Vitamin C.
- The water you use to cook vegetables contains Vitamin C and other micronutrients. Do not throw it away after cooking. Use it to make sauces or add it to soups.
- Eat cooked vegetables as soon as possible after they are prepared.
- Do not keep or store cooked vegetables for a long time.

Vitamin C helps your body absorb iron

Vitamin C will help your body absorb the iron in foods. When you eat iron-rich foods like fish, red meat, eggs or legumes (beans, lentils, peas or groundnuts), you should also eat food rich in Vitamin C together with or soon after the meal. For example, if you serve dark green leafy vegetables such as morning glory or kale, you are serving a dish that has lots of Vitamin C. You can also use lemon or tamarind as an ingredient in your meal or you can eat pineapple, mango or other fruits rich in Vitamin C after the meal.

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