



THE RAINBOW DIET

Include colourful fruits and vegetables in your diet to maximize your nutrient intake

By SHEENA TAVAKI

A salad of orange, watermelon and peas is summer. A side of beans, carrots, corn, and broccoli. That's something about those or more colours on a plate that immediately lifts one's mood. But it's more than that. "The more vibrant the colour, the more antioxidants the vegetable or fruit" says Masahito Inoue, director and general manager at Desuphika Agency.

Foods get their colour from the phytochemicals present in them. "These phytochemicals are vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that are essential for the body, that are good for preventing and reducing the risk of various diseases," she adds.

This visual cue, believes Sonoma Park, director at Mumbai's Narayana Super Specialty Hospital, is also nature's simple pointer to make sure you get different nutrients. "Everything that your body requires is colour-coded," she says. Anthocyanins, which gives blueberries their colour, also keeps your mind sharp and defends your body with antioxidants, while the lycopenes that gives watermelon and tomatoes their redness, protects against prostate and breast cancer and fights heart disease. Beta carotene, which makes carrots orange, keeps the bones strong. The yellow colour in foods comes from beta carotene and apricot health, green detoxifies, and purple, which is rich in polyphenols and potassium, strengthens the muscular and circulatory systems.

Each colour adds a different nutrient, so the more is to keep you meals as colourful as possible. Park suggests choosing three colours for each of the five-to-six meals in a day. "The rainbow diet will definitely your body and local immunity and strong bones," says Park.

But do remember that a colourful refined or packaged items do not count. As far as possible, eat the vegetables and fruits either raw, baked or cooked.

RED
Not just the juicy and of a tomato, watermelon, pomegranate, strawberry or apricot to get some lycopenes in your system. "Lycopene is one of the strongest antioxidants. It protects against prostate cancer, cardiovascular disease and damage from ultraviolet light exposure," says Laxman Bhat, clinical nutritionist at Fortis La Femme in New Delhi, India. Lysoene, or the red pigment in fruits and vegetables, decreases the risk of muscular degeneration, stroke and even in types of cancer, says Dr. Choudhary, senior nutritionist at Max Super Specialty Hospital in Shalimar Bagh, New Delhi.

ORANGE
The phytochemicals responsible for the orange colour in fruits are vegetables such as carrots, mangoes or pumpkins are carotenoids, says Choudhary. "Carotenoids" he says, "help maintain healthy vision, strengthen and healthy eyes, as well as help reduce the risk of cancer and heart diseases, and also improve immune system function."

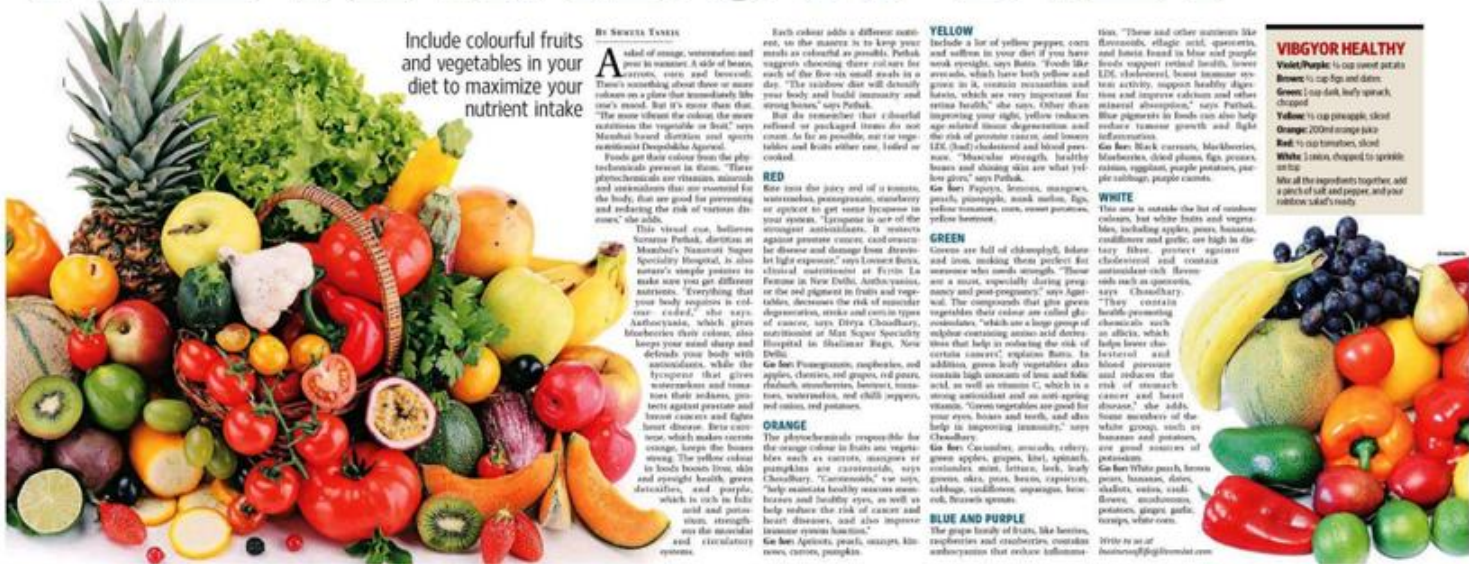
GREEN
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YELLOW
Include a lot of yellow pepper, corn and yolk in your diet if you have weak eyesight, says Bhat. "Foods like avocados, which have both yellow and green in it, contain lutein and zeaxanthin, which are very important for retina health," she says. Other than improving your sight, yellow reduces age-related vision degeneration and the risk of prostate cancer, and lowers LDL (bad) cholesterol and blood pressure. "Muscular strength, healthy bones and strong skin are what yellow gives," says Park.

BLUE AND PURPLE
The group made of fruits, like berries, raspberries and cranberries, contains anthocyanins that reduce inflammation.

WHITE
This one is outside the list of vegetable colours, but white fruits and vegetables, including apples, pears, bananas, cauliflower and garlic, are high in dietary fibre. "Protect against cholesterol and certain antioxidant-rich flavonoids such as quercetin," says Choudhary. "They contain health-promoting chemicals such as allicin, which helps lower cholesterol and blood pressure and reduces the risk of stomach cancer and heart disease," she adds. Some members of the white group, such as bananas and potatoes, are good sources of potassium.

VIBGYOR HEALTHY
Violet/Purple: 1/2 cup sweet potato
Brown: 1/2 cup figs and dates
Green: 1/2 cup dark leafy greens, chard
Yellow: 1/2 cup pineapple, chard
Orange: 200 mango juice
Red: 1/2 cup tomatoes, skin
White: 1/2 cup chickpeas, chickpea
Mix all the ingredients together, add a pinch of salt and pepper, and your rainbow salad's ready.



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