

Vegetables are highly nutritious and should form the basis of your everyday diet. They contain vitamins (including vitamins A, C and folate), minerals (including potassium, iron and magnesium), dietary fibre, carbohydrate and phytochemicals (protective plant compounds such as antioxidants). When eaten regularly, they can also help protect you from certain diseases. However, many Australians struggle to eat the recommended amount each day.

How much are Australians eating?

Most Australians don't eat enough vegetables. According to the National Nutrition Survey:

- 16 percent of adults did not eat any vegetables on the day of the survey;
- only 32 percent of adults ate more than the minimum amount of vegetables recommended for good health; and
- almost one third of children ate no fruit or vegetables on the day before the survey.



Why do I need to eat more vegetables?

Regular intake of vegetables may help protect against several common diseases and conditions including:

• Heart (cardiovascular) disease

Research suggests that antioxidants in vegetables reduce the amount of cholesterol the body makes, which in turn reduces the build up of cholesterol in blood vessels that is characteristic of heart disease. Folic acid, found in leafy vegetables such as spinach and silverbeet, may also have protective effects.

• High blood pressure (hypertension)

Vegetables that contain the minerals potassium and magnesium have the potential to control high blood pressure by helping lower it. Sources include spinach, potatoes and pumpkin.

• Stroke

Research has shown that people who eat adequate amounts of fruit and vegetables are less likely to suffer from stroke.

• Type 2 diabetes

Eating plenty of vegetables can help prevent type 2 diabetes by controlling factors which contribute to its development, such as obesity. For people with existing diabetes, vegetables are a rich source of fibre and have a low glycaemic index which is thought to help manage blood glucose levels.

• Some forms of cancer

Research suggests that approximately 10% of cancer in Australia is caused by inadequate intake of fruit and vegetables. Types of cancer that are strongly linked with insufficient vegetable intake include mouth, oesophagus, stomach and colon cancers.

How much should I eat?

Australian Dietary Guidelines encourage us to eat plenty of vegetables, legumes and fruit. The amount of vegetables required to meet nutritional needs varies according to factors such as age, sex, pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Adults should aim to eat at least five serves of vegetables or legumes each day.

How much is a serve?

A serve of vegetables or legumes is equal to:

- ½ cup (75g) cooked vegetables
- ½ cup (75g) cooked dried beans, peas or lentils
- 1 cup of salad vegetables
- 1 small potato

What types of vegetables should I eat?

It is important to remember to vary the type of vegetables that you eat to ensure that your diet supplies a range of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients. All vegetables contribute to good health; fresh, frozen and canned. Phytochemicals in vegetables give them their characteristic colours. To maximise potential health benefits, choose one vegetable from each colour group every day to increase the variety of protective phytochemicals you consume (see

Purple	Beetroot, eggplant, purple asparagus, red cabbage, spanish onion
Green	Peas, brussels sprouts, green capsicum, beans
White/ Brown	Chick peas, mushrooms, cauliflower, potatoes, shallots
Orange/ Yellow	Carrots, pumpkin, corn, sweet potato yellow capsicum, squash
Red	Radishes, red kidney beans, tomatoes, red capsicum



Vegetables are a source of important nutrients

Vegetables consist mainly of carbohydrate, fibre, water and small amounts of protein. They are low in fat, sodium and sugar, and contain a wide variety of beneficial nutrients (see table below).

Ways to include more vegetables in your diet

An easy way to increase your vegetable intake is to add an extra serve of vegetables to the meals you already eat. For example:

- Try mushrooms or chopped veggies on toast for breakfast.
- Snack on raw vegetable sticks with dip.
- Add vegetables and legumes to main meals such as soups, stir-fries and casseroles, or serve mains with cooked vegetables or salad.

Do children need to eat as much vegetables as adults?

Children are not expected to eat the same amount of

vegetables as adults because their stomachs are smaller and their energy needs greater. For children, the minimum number of serves is determined by age:

Selecting and Preparing Vegetables

The type of vegetables that you buy (e.g. fresh, frozen, canned), and the way you prepare them can impact on nutrient content. Tips on nutrient content in vegetables include:

- Frozen and canned vegetables retain good levels of nutrients and are an acceptable alternative to fresh varieties.
- Quick methods of cooking that use minimal amounts of water reduce nutrient losses, and include stir-frying, steaming and using a pressure cooker or microwave.
- Cooking can sometimes improve nutrient content, by concentrating and breaking down nutrients into forms that are more easily absorbed by the body. Nutrients enhanced by cooking include lycopene (an antioxidant found in red fruit and vegetables), iron, calcium and magnesium.

Nutrient	What does it do?	Where is it found?
Protein	Provides energy; used for cell repair and growth.	Legumes such as soybeans, kidney beans, chickpeas & lentils.
Fibre	Keeps the digestive system healthy & regular.	Dried beans, peas, chickpeas & cabbage.
Calcium	For strong bones and teeth	Kale, parsley & chives provide moderate amounts.
Iron	Keeps blood cells healthy; transports oxygen to muscles for movement.	Legumes are a good source. Spinach & parsley provide lesser amounts.
Magnesium	For strong bones & teeth; aids nerve & muscle function.	Kale, silverbeet, soybeans and spinach provide moderate amounts.
Potassium	Regulates the balance of water & acid in blood.	Potatoes are a good source. Parsley, spinach & watercress provide lesser amounts.
Vitamin A	Protects cells from damage; maintains good vision & skin.	Dark green & orange vegetables such as carrots, pumpkin, spinach and orange sweet potato.
Vitamin C	Protects cells from damage & aids healing.	Green peas & beans, potatoes, pumpkin, spinach, zucchini, Brussels sprouts, leek, capsicum, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage & tomatoes.
Vitamin E	Protects cells from damage; maintains healthy skin.	Asparagus, spinach, silverbeet & parsley provide moderate amounts.
Folate	Aids growth & development	Asparagus, broccoli, dried peas & beans, spinach, silverbeet & Brussels sprouts.
Phytochemicals	Help reduce risk of cancer, heart disease & other degenerative diseases	Kale, spinach & many cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts and cauliflower.