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HAVE A PLANT[®]
CONSUMER MARKETING
TOOLKIT SPRING 2024

Food Rooted In A Better Mood[®]

**Feeling Good About
Produce Packaging**

Share The Have A Plant[®] Love
Ideas & Inspiration

What's In Season?
Fruit & Veggie Highlights

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Bringing Food Rooted In A Better Mood[®]
Alive In Your Stores

Culinary Corner
How To Make Vegetables Taste Good:
Flavor Pairings & Cooking Strategies

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

 **THE
FOUNDATION**
FOR FRESH PRODUCE

Food Rooted In A Better Mood®

Fruits and veggies can lift your spirits! There can be immense joy in the sweet-tasting, healthy eating experience of fruits, and smart satisfaction associated with the success of preparing vegetables as a meal, or as part of a meal.



BY KATIE CALLIGARO
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
FOUNDATION FOR FRESH PRODUCE



Over the last year the world has much returned to a pre-pandemic hustle and bustle, with other challenges emerging. This can leave people feeling overwhelmed with the day-to-day management of work-life balance and healthy eating, concerns about inflation and more. But if there's one thing that remains constant: fruits and vegetables are available year-round and provide important nutrients Americans are lacking. AND, research shows there are many ways they can make you FEEL better too! Read on...

Did you know that eating fruits and vegetables is not only good for your health, but can also boost your mood? It's true. There is scientific evidence suggesting cognitive health benefits of some fruits and vegetables, and we also know people who eat fruits and vegetables every single day report a greater sense of overall life satisfaction and happiness. I love this stat!

We at the Foundation for Fresh Produce have been talking about the concept of Food Rooted In A Better Mood® for a few years now. And you know we like a good play on words. Fruits and veggies are the plants that no one is eating enough of. And we know consumers KNOW that these plants are good for them. But still, 9 out of 10 Americans aren't eating the daily recommended amounts. So here's a plan. Have A Plant®. Not just for your health. But for your happiness!

I also like to point to the actual feelings that people have when they eat certain foods. People report experiencing joy when eating berries, for example, and pride when serving their family vegetables. The positive emotional connections people have with the experience of eating fruits and vegetables is one we can tap into as communicators, as leaders, as menu developers

and counselors. Maybe it's using different adjectives when describing a menu item, or in how you're writing a recipe description. Maybe it's as simple as showing more visuals of people happily eating these foods in consumer-facing collateral. But they also have to taste good for people to want to repeat the behavior, right? This is where the flavor combinations come in, or creative cooking techniques like grilling or smoking, that people start enjoying this time of year. Creating habits that feel good, and that are EASY, are what we are trying to accomplish together. What can you do to tap into your expertise to bring this experience to life?

In this toolkit, you will find research tidbits, expert quotes, social media posts, in-store activation ideas for those working in retail, as well as culinary tips to help consumers eat and enjoy more fruits and vegetables every day for better health AND happiness.

If there is nothing else you do for consumers this year – whether in restaurants, in food service or retail establishments, on social media channels or in public and private practices, please: invite them to Have A Plant®. Their bodies, minds and souls will thank you!

Katie Calligaro
Marketing & Communications Director
Foundation for Fresh Produce



Feeling Good About Produce Packaging



BY TAMARA MURUETAGOIENA
VICE PRESIDENT OF SUSTAINABILITY
INTERNATIONAL FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION

Research shows that eating more fruits and vegetables is important not just for physical health, but also for mental health. This extends to feeling great about caring for the earth by understanding the sustainability story of choosing fruits and vegetables first.

Recyclable, compostable and sustainable are just some of the many words used to talk about fruit and vegetable packaging, making it difficult to know – how can you feel good not just about what you’re eating, but also how it impacts the entire world?

When you talk with your clients, customers and followers about packaging for fruits and vegetables there two very important topics to consider and emphasize: food safety and food waste.

Packaging has a purpose. For fruits and vegetables, that purpose plays at least 3 roles. Firstly, it’s designed with food safety in mind. Secondly, it’s created to extend shelf life and ensure food stays fresher longer. Thirdly, it’s created for consumers.

Because of the wide variety of fresh produce, a wide variety of packaging is needed as well. For example, an apple or citrus fruit which has a durable skin or rind, does not need to be kept cold, and has a relatively long shelf life may only require the smallest form of packaging – the PLU sticker. Other products, like mixed salads, require packaging to keep pathogens and other food safety concerns out of the product.

While there have been incredible innovations to create recyclable, compostable, and other types of sustainable packaging, there is no alternative that exists that can replace plastic as a food safety solution at this time.

That is one of the major reasons the produce industry is so invested in creating new sustainable packaging options. There have been great innovations from a home compostable PLU sticker to plant-based packaging materials.

Quotes

for you to use

“The produce industry does not consider sustainable packaging to be a luxury, but rather a necessity for the health of our planet and for ourselves.”

- Tamara Muruetagoiena
Vice President of Sustainability,
International Fresh Produce Association

“Whether you have a diagnosed mood disorder or just a case of the blahs, consistently eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day may help.”

- Dr. Taylor Wallace
Food & Nutrition Scientist;
Principal & CEO, Think Healthy Group

“Eating foods we know to be healthy can lead to positive emotions like pride. It can also support feelings of increased self-esteem, especially if the fruit and vegetable consumption can replace some ‘guilty’ food experiences.”

- Dr. Jason Riis
Behavioral Scientist;
President, Behavioralize

This isn't to say that a product's packaging necessarily makes it more or less sustainable than other products because you truly have to look at its entire lifecycle. Packaging is just one of many components that factor into sustainability measures. For example, the amount of energy needed to create certain types of packaging. Did you know that the price of gas is directly linked to the price of packaging? If gas prices are high, it may cost a company more to purchase new clamshells for their product and less for recycled plastic. On the other hand, if gas prices are low, those recycled clamshells may be more expensive.

Cost of packaging is not the only challenge. Many fruits and vegetables go through packaging and processing plants on their way from the field to the store. These plants have huge, custom machines that have been built to support specific types of packaging. The infrastructure is needed to process food quickly, so it reaches the store as safe and fresh as possible. It also means that a company can't easily pivot from a plastic clamshell to cardboard and back again even if the cost of different materials fluctuates. When considering cost of all of their inputs, growers also have to consider where that cost is made up and many times – because the margins are already very thin – that ends up being passed to consumers.

Growers are also concerned with the performance of the packaging for keeping food fresh and safe. For example, using cardboard to ship apples, for example, can be a great solution as apples are kept relatively cold and dry. Strawberries, however, are grown in hot environments with high moisture, cardboard could fall apart under those conditions.

It is important for consumers to understand that the produce industry does not consider sustainable packaging to be a luxury, but rather a necessity for the health of our planet and for ourselves. It's also been widely known for quite some time that plant-forward eating is one of the choices we can make to lighten our environmental impact and feel good about our food choices. As you communicate about fruit and vegetable packaging and sustainability please keep these three things in mind:

1. Packaging has a purpose: to ensure that the products that reach you are safe and fresh.
2. The produce industry is committed to creating new, sustainable packaging option and innovation from is always coming.
1. Choosing fruits and vegetables is a decision to feel great about because it supports your physical and mental health as well as the health of the planet.



Key Consumer Messages

Mental health is just as important as physical health. Eating delicious fruits and veggies can boost your health AND your mood!

Research suggests eating more fruits and veggies can help improve happiness, satisfaction, and emotional well-being.

There is joy in the sweet-tasting eating experience of fruit, and smart satisfaction associated with the success of preparing vegetables.

Eating more fruits and vegetables can help you have a more positive outlook on life and feel confident and proud that you are making the best food decisions.

Choosing fruits and vegetables is a decision that will boost your mood because it supports your physical and mental health as well as the health of the planet.

Celebrate loud and often when kids eat fruits and veggies! The pride and happiness this can instill will make them more likely to eat them again next time.

Insights From Research



Those who reported eating fruits and veggies every day of the week were significantly more likely to report being happy and satisfied with their life.

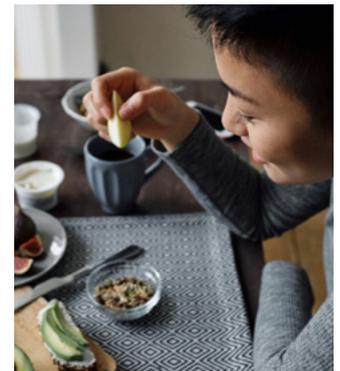


65% of people who eat vegetables daily say they are happy vs 42% of people who do not eat vegetables.

68% of people who eat fruit daily say they are happy vs 33% of people who do not eat fruit.



People who eat the most fruits and vegetables pointed to several physical, emotional, and social benefits including pride in their choices, feeling good in their day-to-day activities, alleviation of physical illness, and confidence in their future health.



Those who do not eat fruits and vegetables are significantly more likely to report feeling hopelessness and disengagement.

REFERENCE: The Foundation for Fresh Produce

[Novel Approaches To Measuring & Promoting Fruit & Vegetable Consumption, 2017](#)

Share The Have A Plant® Love: Ideas & Inspiration

These themes were designed to help break through the clutter and serve as a guidepost to create content that tells a compelling story that gets people thinking about, choosing and eating fruits and veggies at every meal occasion.

APRIL

Sustainable Habits

This month we'll tap into positive fruit and veggie experiences that can create sustainable new habits, keeping you feeling happy and healthy.

Additional Weekly Themes

Fruit & Veggie Care

Let's do our part to care for the fruits and veggies we eat and enjoy every day from root to leaf.

Shop Smarter, Not Harder

If you love finding deals and steals, these tips for planning and shopping for plant-packed meals and snacks will up your game!

What's In Season In Spring?

Your guide to what's in season and all the tips and recipes you need for creating awesome spring-inspired plant-packed snacks and meals.

Promotion Ideas

Bring The Restaurant To You!

- Collaborate with local restaurant chefs for in-store cooking demos that feature spring produce.
- Bring a local chef into your cafeteria or dining hall for hands-on classes making produce-centric recipes inspired by their restaurant.
- Create videos or infographics for social media to show how consumers can add more produce to their plate when dining out.

Your Eco-Friendly Era

- Design shopping guides emphasizing sustainable choices (tips on selecting locally-sourced produce or eco-friendly packaged fruits and veggies) for your website, app or store circular.
- Create a newsletter edition that shares eco-friendly recipes and tips on how to practice sustainable health and wellness habits.
- Teach students how produce is grown with a campus greenhouse.

Show Your Care For Fruits & Veggies

- Host classes in-store on proper fruit and vegetable care to minimize waste.
- Teach your audience how to store, freeze and revive produce, promoting a longer shelf life and reducing food waste at home.
- Share social media infographics or videos on how to make the most of your restaurant leftovers to minimize waste.

National Observances

Earth Month

National Garden Month

National Pecan Month

National BLT Month

National Soft Pretzel Month

National Grilled Cheese Month

National Poetry Month

Keep America Beautiful Month

National Garlic Month

National Soy Foods Month

National Burrito Day (April 4)

National Make Lunch Count Day (April 13)

Earth Day (April 22)

MAY

Food Rooted In A Better Mood®

It's National Mental Health Month and let's be real – we don't have to overthink this. It's just plants! You don't have to dig too deep to add fun and flavor to your everyday routine. Give your mind a break, we got you.

Additional Weekly Themes

Munchin' For Your Melon

Mental health is just as important as physical health! Dedicate your May to self-care, mindfulness and positivity-boosting fruits and veggies!

Playful May

Give yourself permission to act like a kid and take a grown-up twist on childhood favorites. Let's have some fun!

Mind-Blowing Hacks For Chillin' & Grillin'

We've got the simple hacks you need to cut prep time and grill like a culinary pro so you don't have to think about it. This is going to be easy!

Promotion Ideas

Delicious DIY Smoothies

- Set up an interactive smoothie bar in the cafeteria or dining hall to allow diners to create their own smoothie.
- Host a smoothie-making competition and share the winning recipes on social media, in newsletters or on your website.
- Create signage or quick tips that provide nutritional information/health benefits of various smoothie ingredients.

Salads That Are Cool Classes

- Host a cooking class on campus or in your workplace on how to create delicious and satisfying salads using seasonal produce.
- Offer in-store tastings of unique salads, distribute recipe cards and provide tips on building nutrient-packed salads.
- Teach a workshop or create a video on how to properly chop, dice, etc. seasonal produce specifically for various salad recipes.

Community Recipe Exchange

- Make a bulletin board in the dining hall or in-store for people to share their favorite produce-centric grilling recipes.
- Create a questions box in your IG Stories to generate conversation around how more produce can be added to summertime meals.
- Share recipes of cafeteria favorites that are scaled-down for at-home use to send home with students.

National Observances

National Mental Health Month
National Beef Month
National BBQ Month
National Loaded Potato Month
National Hamburger Month
National Egg Month
National Salad Month
National Salsa Month
National Strawberry Month
National Apple Pie Day (May 13)
National Grilling Day (May 16)
National Pizza Party Day (May 17)

JUNE

Effortless Outdoor Entertaining

What better way to boost your mood than enjoying fruits & veggies outside? Elevate your outdoor entertaining spread for a mid-day relaxation sesh to welcome in the start of summer.

Additional Weekly Themes

Fruit & Veggie Fusions

Bring some inspiration to your hydration by adding fruits and veggies to your everyday bottle of water AND by getting your nutrients in with all the juice!

Fun Flavors Of BBQ

Explore unique flavors and techniques from around the world for creating delicious BBQ fruits and veggies.

Fresh Food Hacks For Picnics

We're keeping safety first this summer with all the hacks you need to keep your fruits and veggies fresh this outdoor entertaining season.

Promotion Ideas

Enjoy The Great Outdoors

- Merchandise produce and protein items near each other to encourage shoppers to create DIY kits geared towards outdoor entertaining.
- Curate meal kits to sell in a c-store including seasonal produce, grilling essentials, picnic accessories and accompanying recipes.
- Take meal time outdoors. Serve grilled meats, fruits and veggies al fresco to encourage diners to enjoy produce beyond the table.

Grilling Globally

- Host an international BBQ themed cooking demo series in dining halls. Explore the unique flavors and techniques of BBQ from different regions such as Korea, Brazil, Thailand, Argentina, Jamaica and more.
- Create a video series for social media that shares various international BBQ recipes.
- Do an international BBQ menu takeover. Feature various BBQ recipes paired with regional produce based on where the dish is from.

Put Food Safety First

- Share tips with shoppers on how they can put food safety first this outdoor entertaining season.
- Create infographics or short videos on proper temperatures for foods, how to wash produce or hacks for keeping cold food cold and hot food hot to share on social media.
- Develop a short lesson on food safety to share with science or health classes in schools.

National Observances

National Dairy Month

National Fresh Fruit and Vegetables Month

National Iced Tea Month

National Papaya Month

MyPlate's Birthday (June 2)

National Egg Day (June 3)

National Cheese Day (June 4)

Share The Have A Plant® Love: Ideas & Inspiration

Sample Social Media Posts · #haveaplant

Use these sample posts to easily share the fruit and veggie love — eating more plants is delicious and fun!

APRIL: Sustainable Habits

Springtime 🌱 is here! It's a great time to check-in with yourself on how you can keep feeling healthy & happy with habits & experiences that can create sustainable change. Do you have a routine or habit that involves #produce? Share in the comments below. 🙌 #haveaplant

Planting the seeds of sustainable habits! 🌱 Let's dive into the joy of embracing more fruits & veggies in our daily lives. 🍓🥦 Get all the inspo you need to do so: bit.ly/3uzz5Dt. Tag a friend and let's inspire each other to embrace sustainable habits! #haveaplant

🛒 Ready to master the art of shopping smarter? Let's dive into savvy produce picks! 🍏📺 Here's your ultimate guide to Shop Smarter, Not Harder: bit.ly/476ufeM #haveaplant

MAY: Food Rooted In A Better Mood®

Chillin' n Grillin' Alert! 🔥🍌🍍 Ready to elevate your grilling game this summer? Check out these mind-blowing hacks to add a fresh & flavorful twist to your cookouts! bit.ly/3tVrqPJ #haveaplant

Give your mind a break this Playful May & see how much fun you can have with fruits & veggies! ❤️ We've got all the ideas to embrace your inner child so you can put a grown-up twist on childhood faves: bit.ly/3vQzBNy #haveaplant

Elevate your brunch game with a touch of produce! It's time to let fruits & veggies take the spotlight at your next celebration. Share your favorite produce-centric brunch ideas below & inspire others to make their brunch tables as beautiful as can be! 🌸🍴 #haveaplant

JUNE: Effortless Outdoor Entertaining

Is it just us or does enjoying fruits & veggies outside make everything so 🍌much 🍌better 🍌?! Elevate your outdoor entertaining menus with the power of produce — fruit & cheese boards, salads that slay, veggie-topped burgers — get inspired: bit.ly/49zCLEi #haveaplant

Embark on a flavor-filled journey with the Fun Flavors of BBQ! 🔥 We're taking your taste buds on an international adventure. 🌍 Get ready for a tantalizing tour of global grilling and a delicious dose of fruits & veggies! bit.ly/4bHr6VU #haveaplant

Up your picnic game with hacks that celebrate the goodness of fruits & veggies! 🍇🥕 Pack your basket with flavor, freshness & a whole lot of health. Here are some hacks to turn your picnic into a vibrant feast: bit.ly/3U68wA3 #haveaplant

Social Media Graphics — Click to download

Instagram & Facebook

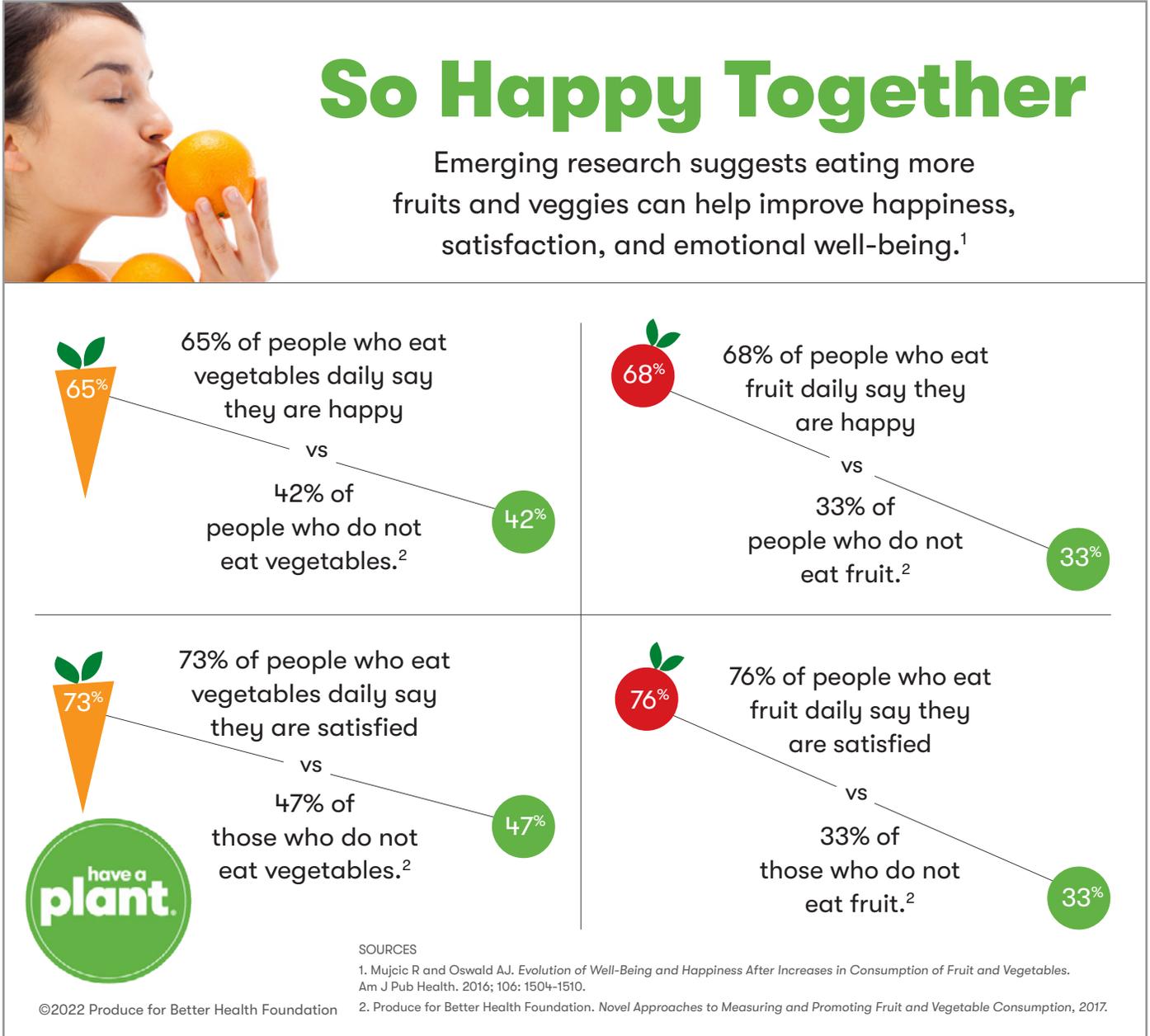


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Infographic

Click on the infographic to download and share. Don't forget to use #haveaplant and tag @fruitsandveggies in all your awesome posts!



What's In Season In Spring?

[Apricots](#)
[Artichokes](#)
[Asparagus](#)
[Barbados Cherries](#)
[Belgian Endive](#)
[Bitter Melon](#)
[Broccoli](#)
[Butter Lettuce](#)
[Cactus](#)
[Chayote Squash](#)
[Cherimoya](#)

[Collard Greens](#)
[Corn](#)
[Fava Beans](#)
[Fennel](#)
[Fiddlehead Ferns](#)
[Green Beans](#)
[Honeydew](#)
[Jackfruit](#)
[Limes](#)
[Lychee](#)
[Mango](#)

[Manoa Lettuce](#)
[Morel Mushrooms](#)
[Mustard Greens](#)
[Oranges](#)
[Peas](#)
[Pineapple](#)
[Purple Asparagus](#)
[Radicchio](#)
[Radish](#)
[Red Leaf Lettuce](#)
[Rhubarb](#)

[Snow Peas](#)
[Sorrel](#)
[Spinach](#)
[Strawberries](#)
[Swiss Chard](#)
[Vidalia Onions](#)
[Watercress](#)
[White Asparagus](#)

Remember, fresh, frozen, canned, dried, and 100% juice are all good choices.

Fruit Highlight: Apricot



Low fat, saturated fat free, cholesterol free, sodium free, excellent source of vitamin A and vitamin C, good source of potassium and fiber.

Select

Apricots are available fresh, canned and dried for good nutrition and convenience. If selecting fresh, choose apricots that are plump, firm and uniformly colored.

Store

Store fresh apricots at room temperature until ripe then in the refrigerator in a plastic bag for 3-5 days. To ripen: place in paper bag on counter.

Serve

[Top 10 Ways to Enjoy Apricots](#)

[Celery Stuffed With Apricot Blue Cheese Spread](#)

[Grilled Chicken Skewers With Apricot Dipping Sauce](#)

[Apricot Almond Brie Bites](#)

[Fruit & Yogurt Bowls](#)

Veggie Highlight: Peas



Fat free, Saturated fat free, Cholesterol free, Sodium free, High in vitamin C, Good source of fiber, Good source of vitamin K, Good source of thiamin, Good source of zinc, Good source of copper, Good source of manganese.

Select

Peas are available fresh, frozen and canned for good nutrition and convenience. If selecting fresh, choose firm, bright green, medium-sized pods with no signs of decay or wilting.

Store

Refrigerate fresh peas in a perforated plastic bag for 3-5 days. Shell peas immediately before using.

Serve

[Quinoa Salad With Corn & Peas](#)

[Cheeseburger Macaroni With Beans & Peas](#)

[Simple Spaghetti With Garlic, Peas & Parmesan](#)

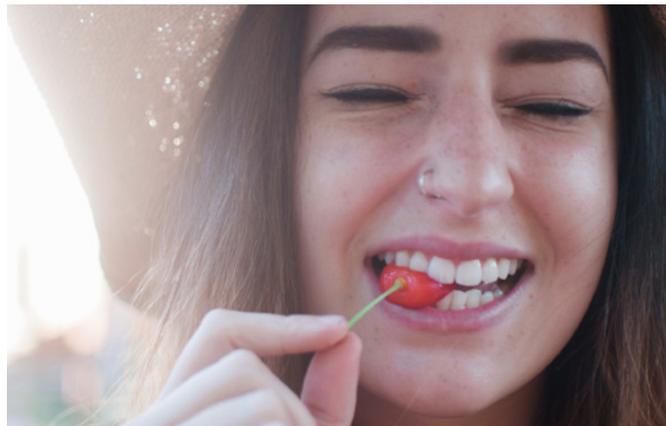
[Sesame Chicken](#)

Bring Food Rooted In A Better Mood[®] Alive In Your Stores



BY ANNETTE MAGGI, MS, RDN, LD, FAND
RETAIL SPECIALIST

National Mental Health Month in May is the perfect time to engage shoppers on the power of fruits and vegetables to improve mood. The science, messages and activation ideas below will help you reach a new consumer group interested in mental well-being.



The Science

- According to Gallup, nearly 4 out of 10 consumers globally say their lives have been impacted recently by depression or anxiety.
- Systematic reviews have found that higher fruit and vegetable intake is associated with better mental health and reduced suffering from depression.¹
- A study of young adults aged 18-25 found that higher raw fruit and vegetable consumption was predictive of better mental health outcomes.¹
- Sixty-five percent of people who eat vegetables daily say they are happy vs 42 percent of people who do not eat vegetables.²
- Sixty-eight percent of people who eat fruit daily say they are happy vs 33 percent of people who do not eat fruit.²
- Seventy-three percent of people who ate vegetables 6-7 days of the week said they are satisfied with their life as a whole compared to 68% of those who eat vegetables less often and 47% of people who eat no vegetables at all.

The Activations

- Given heightened media attention towards mental health, suggest a segment on food and mood to partners at local media outlets. Share the science. Focus viewers on a message of daily consumption being equally important to eating more every day.
- Find your silly. While fruits and veggies themselves have the power to improve mood, bring out all your silliness in social videos, stories, and reels to pump up the fun. Do demos of fruits and veggie flowers ahead of Mother's Day; showcase crazy combinations with fruits and veggies your followers have never considered (yes, tomato slices and peanut butter are delish together!); or let kids create a recipe that you make, whether it's a flop or not.
- Create a class on the role of foods, including fruits and vegetables, in improving mental health outcomes. Partner with mental health providers, who have an audience for this content.
- Partner with your company's pharmacy department to post messaging on food and mood for signage or to attach to prescription bags.

References:

1. Taylor C. Wallace, Regan L. Bailey, Jeffrey B. Blumberg, Britt Burton-Freeman, C-y. Oliver Chen, Kristi M. Crowe-White, Adam Drewnowski, Shirin Hooshmand, Elizabeth Johnson, Richard Lewis, Robert Murray, Sue A. Shapses & Ding Ding Wang (2020) Fruits, vegetables, and health: A comprehensive narrative, umbrella review of the science and recommendations for enhanced public policy to improve intake, *Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition*, 60:13, 2174-2211, DOI: 10.1080/10408398.2019.1632258
2. [Novel Approaches to Measuring and Promoting Consumption](#), Produce for Better Health Foundation, 2017.

How To Make Vegetables Taste Good: Flavor Pairings & Cooking Strategies



BY CARA HARBSTREET, MS, RD
STREET SMART NUTRITION

As professionals encouraging people to enjoy more fruits and vegetables, we all know vegetables can be a bit more of a challenge than fruit. Here are some of my best tips for helping people make vegetables taste so good that they'll actually want to eat them!

How to Cook Vegetables for Better Flavor

Here are some cooking methods to help tone down the bitterness and make veggies taste better. What do they have in common? High temperatures! When you cook vegetables over high heat, you can get a slight caramelization effect. The result is browning around the edges. Some of the molecules in the veggies are converted to simple sugars, helping them taste less bitter or slightly sweeter.

Tip: This caramelization effect is different than the very specific Maillard reaction, although it's sometimes used interchangeably to describe the flavors that results from cooking over high heat. The Maillard reaction, such as the browning on baked bread or the searing on steaks, occurs between amino acids (proteins) and reducing sugars (carbohydrates). Caramelization can refer to a variety of different chemical reactions that create sweet, nutty flavor profiles in foods.

Try these cooking techniques:

Grilling or Smoking: This works particularly well during warmer months. If you're firing up the grill or smoker for other recipes, throw some vegetables into the mix! The high heat and smoky flavors can add a distinct charred flavor that you might enjoy.

Roasting: Use a sheet pan and spread cubed or chopped veggies in a single layer. Don't overcrowd your pan, as moisture will release during cooking and they will wind up mushy or soggy. Leave enough space for air to circulate in between and you'll see the browning effect you're looking for!



Sauteing: This stovetop cooking method often uses oil to help prevent sticking. My top choice? Butter. As it cooks, it goes through a browning reaction of its own. It's a very simple way to make vegetables taste better.

Air Frying: If you have one, put it to good use! Like roasting, the air that circulates around vegetables as they cook can improve the texture and overall flavor.

How to Season Vegetables for Better Flavor

Seasonings are one of my favorite things to play around with in the kitchen. Using fresh or dried herbs, spices, oils, vinegar, cheese, and other ingredients can totally change the way a recipe turns out.

Get creative with some of these suggestions for:

Leafy greens: chili sauce or chili oil, infused vinegars, horseradish, green onions, red pepper flakes, sesame seeds

Carrots, sweet potatoes, or butternut squash: allspice, anise, browned butter, cumin, honey, mint, orange (juice or zest), tarragon, thyme

Mushrooms: capers, cilantro and coriander, fennel, lemon (juice or zest), rosemary, tarragon

Broccoli, cauliflower, or other cruciferous vegetables: curry powder or garam masala, hollandaise sauce, mint, white pepper, pine nuts, mustard and mustard seeds

Potatoes: basil, cilantro, dill, garam masala, marjoram, paprika, sage, vinegar, yogurt or sour cream

And now I'll let you in on my #1 seasoning hack for making vegetables taste better: MSG.

Yes, MSG or monosodium glutamate. It adds so much delicious umami (savory) flavor that I rarely cook vegetables without it.

It's unfortunate that MSG has been cast as a "bad" thing for foods. I see far too many "made without MSG" labels on food packages and in restaurants, which is disappointing. I think of all the flavor they're missing out on! MSG is safe to consume (we have the science to prove it). And since it can reduce added salt in recipes by 30 to 60%, it seems like an obvious choice. Flavor plus better nutrition? That's a win-win for me!

Another unique ingredient I love: liquid smoke. A little bit goes a long way, so a small bottle can last quite a while. It adds a savory, smoky flavor that will make your vegetables feel like you just pulled them out of the smoker.

How to Serve Vegetables for Better Flavor

With a dipping sauce: Think beyond the classic veggies + ranch... I mean, ranch does make veggies taste better, but dipping sauces can span the entire flavor spectrum too and balance the tastes and textures in very complementary ways.



Photo courtesy of Cara Harbstreet

With a dressing: Vegetables don't have to be in a salad to get topped with dressing. I rely on the Honey Mustard Vinaigrette for so many things! Try mixing your own DIY dressings at home with unique oils and vinegars or turn to your favorite store-bought versions for convenience.

With a pickled element: Pickle brining liquids range from super salty or sour to mildly sweet and tangy. Depending on the type of vinegar, herbs, and spices used, it can add a whole new layer of flavor. And don't limit yourself to traditional dill pickle flavors. My Quick Pickled Cucumber & Onion recipe shown above is one of my most popular recipes and uses a sweet and tangy rice vinegar brining liquid.

Whether you have a picky eater on your hands, want to expand your taste horizons, or simply want to get out of a flavor rut, I hope you'll try some of these tips!

Sesame Chicken



INGREDIENTS

- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds
- nonstick cooking spray
- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into strips
- 2 cups snow peas, trimmed
- 1 medium red bell pepper, cubed
- 1 medium green bell pepper, cubed
- 2 ½ tablespoons low-sodium soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1 ½ teaspoons brown sugar
- ¼ teaspoon ground ginger
- 2 green onions, sliced

DIRECTIONS

1. Place sesame seeds in a large nonstick skillet; cook for 2 minutes over MEDIUM-HIGH heat until lightly browned.
2. Remove from skillet and set aside.
3. Spray same skillet with nonstick cooking spray.
4. Add chicken; cook for 10 minutes or until chicken is cooked through.
5. Add snow peas and bell peppers; stir-fry for 3 to 4 minutes until vegetables are crisp-tender.
6. In a small bowl, combine soy sauce, water, brown sugar, and ginger; add to skillet. Cook for 5 minutes over MEDIUM-HIGH heat.
7. Sprinkle with green onions and serve.



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**And don't forget to use #haveaplant
in all of your relevant posts!**



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