

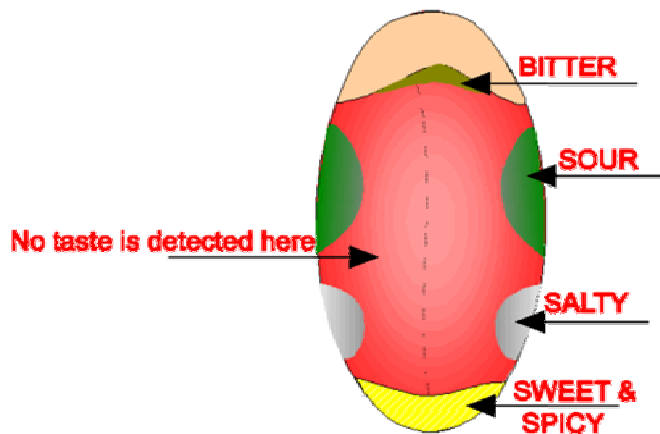
IT'S ALL IN THE TASTE BUDS

SOME PEOPLE ARE PROGRAMMED TO LIKE EITHER FRUIT OR VEGGIES

People may inherit a sense of taste that affects their desire to eat a lot of vegetables and fruits. Studies show that some people's taste and lifestyle preferences make vegetable or fruit consumption easier. By being aware of your preferences, you can find ways to increase the number of these foods you have each day until you meet health recommendations.

One recent study classified people as vegetable lovers, fruit lovers, lovers of both kinds of foods or lovers of neither. According to the study, fruit lovers like sweeter foods and eat dessert more often than vegetable lovers. They may also prefer foods that require less time or effort to prepare.

Vegetable lovers, on the other hand, eat spicy foods more often and enjoy bitter or savory flavors, including tannic red wine. They report trying new recipes more often, hosting more dinner parties and cooking more nutritious meals than fruit lovers.



Take your pick

Because of the differences between these groups, the researchers of this study suggest that people try to meet the goal of five to ten daily servings of vegetables or fruits within their preferences.

Fruit lovers could always choose fruits for desserts and snacks. They could also incorporate fruits into their meals in many ways without much preparation.

Vegetable lovers, in contrast, could make even greater use of spices and new recipes to eat more vegetables. For example, they could learn how to prepare a variety of ethnic dishes.

Vegetables and fruits can contain many of the same vitamins and minerals. Vitamin C can come from kiwi, orange, sweet pepper or cauliflower. Beta-carotene is found in cantaloupe, apricot, winter squash or spinach. Both vegetables and fruits can also be good sources of potassium, magnesium and to some extent folate.

However, vegetables and fruits are nutritionally different, and everyone should eat both. Some important phytochemicals are found mainly in vegetables. For instance, the primary source of isoflavones is soybeans. In addition, anti-cancer indoles and isothiocyanates only come from cruciferous vegetables, like broccoli, cauliflower, bok choy and watercress.

Why you may not like broccoli

Inherited taste preferences may explain why individuals differ in their enjoyment of super-healthy cruciferous vegetables. In one taste test, researchers tried to see how well people could detect a substance known as PROP in solutions of various strengths. Some people couldn't taste it, some people tasted it at moderate concentrations and others had a bitter taste from highly diluted solutions. People who were most often able to taste PROP tended to dislike eating vegetables. A dislike for cruciferous vegetables was especially related to an ability to detect PROP.

Studies suggest that PROP tasters make about 75 percent of the population, so taste preferences may be a significant barrier to meeting nutrition recommendations for many people. Fortunately food preparation methods can decrease a perception of bitterness.

Fat makes food taste less bitter. People who are sensitive to the bitter tastes in cruciferous vegetables might enjoy them better when they're stir-fried or sautéed in a little olive oil, rather than steamed. A salty, sweet or sour flavor can also reduce a bitter taste. So try broccoli and other vegetables of the same family with a dash of lite soy sauce or a sprinkle of Parmesan cheese. Glaze them with a little honey, syrup or marmalade. Or sprinkle them with lemon juice or a mild flavored vinegar.

If you use a small amount of these flavorings, your sugar and salt consumption will rise only moderately. Since the flavor of greens and cruciferous vegetables intensifies as they cook, avoid overcooking these vegetables. Not only will they taste better, they'll also be more nutritious.