

Eat a rainbow

As the weather cools, it can be tricky eating a variety of coloured foods

We're told to eat a rainbow for all the goodness various coloured plants and vegetables contain.

In summer, it is pretty easy; think bright fruit medleys and colourful garden salads. But as the seasons shift into cooler temperatures the appeal of a cold salad can chill too.

Yet this is when we should be eating more of these nutritional powerhouses; to help the body prepare for the immune-challenging months ahead.

The Nutrition Specialists nutritionist and Dietitians' Association of Australia spokeswoman Margaret Hays says autumn is the time to shift the thinking on colourful meals.

"It is important to keep eating colourful fruits and vegetables as we head into the cooler months because they're packed with vitamins, minerals and antioxidants," Ms Hays says.

"You don't have to think that to eat colourful foods they have to be cold; some of my favourite colourful meals in autumn and winter are soups and casseroles;

just throw in broccoli and leafy greens right at the end so they don't go mushy."

Or, try a roasted-vegetable warm salad.

"They're delicious; and a meal full of colour means it is full of nutrients," Ms Hays says.

Nutritionist Julie Meek says her top three autumn picks are

figs, pomegranate and beetroot — as they are packed with fibre, vitamins and antioxidants.

"These colourful beauties will boost your energy and immune system in preparation for the cooler months," she says.

WHAT'S IN A COLOUR?

RED

Red fruits and vegetables are coloured by a natural plant pigment called lycopene, which is a powerful antioxidant that can help reduce the risk of cancer and keep our heart healthy.

PURPLE /BLUE

The plant pigment anthocyanin is what gives blue/purple fruits and vegetables their distinctive colour. Anthocyanin also has antioxidant properties that protect cells from damage and can help reduce the risk of cancer, stroke and heart disease.

ORANGE/YELLOW

Carotenoids give this group their vibrant colour. A well-known carotenoid called beta-carotene is found in sweet potatoes, pumpkins and carrots. It is converted to vitamin A, which helps maintain healthy mucous membranes and healthy eyes. Another carotenoid

called lutein is stored in the eye and has been found to prevent cataracts and age-related macular degeneration, which can lead to blindness.

GREEN

Green vegetables contain a range of phytochemicals including carotenoids, indoles and saponins, all of which have anti-cancer properties. Leafy greens such as spinach and broccoli are also excellent sources of folate.

BROWN/WHITE

White fruits and vegetables contain a range of health-promoting phytochemicals such as allicin (found in garlic) which is known for its antiviral and antibacterial properties. Some members of the white group, such as bananas and potatoes, are also a good source of potassium.

Source: Nutrition Australia

GET KIDS INVOLVED

A great way to keep track of the colours children eat each day is to create a fruit and veg rainbow poster. Every time the child eats a colourful fruit and vegetable they can place a corresponding coloured sticker on the rainbow or get them to colour in a small section on the rainbow.



CREATE A RAINBOW ON YOUR PLATE

Make a rainbow fruit salad with fruits of each colour: oranges, strawberries, mango, rockmelon, kiwifruit, bananas and blueberries.

Stir-fry your own mix of vegetables using each colour: red onions, carrots, baby corn, broccoli and mushrooms.

Source: Nutrition Australia



Picture: Getty Images/fstop