It’s summertime! A time for warm sunny weather, relaxing vacations, and playtime with the children. Another great benefit of summer is the abundance of fresh delicious, fruits and vegetables available. Fruits and vegetables contain vitamins, minerals, and fiber needed for good health. The nutrients found in fruits and vegetables give you the power to fight and prevent disease and maintain or achieve a healthy weight says County Extension Agent {insert name here}.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend an average individual consume two cups of fruit and two and a half cups of vegetables every day. Despite the known health benefits of consuming fruits and vegetables, Americans as a whole, do not consume the recommended amounts each day. So what is coming between you and these powerful foods? Is it lack of time or a taste preference? Here are some ways you can increase the amount of fruits and vegetables you eat each day:

If you find yourself blaming your lack of fruit and vegetable consumption on lack of time, don’t be afraid to try canned or frozen fruits and vegetables. They can be ready in minutes and added to any meal. For a healthier product, choose canned fruits packed in their own juice or light syrup. When you shop for frozen vegetables, choose those without sauces which can add unwanted salt, fat, and calories. If you prefer fresh fruits and vegetables, consider purchasing convenience items. For example, buy pre-cut packages of fruit for a healthy snack in seconds. Carry whole fruit or dried fruits and vegetables with you for a quick snack on the go. When you have a minute, spend some time cutting up fruits and vegetables for the rest of the week, so they will be available and ready to use when your schedule is hectic.

For those of you, who find little appeal to certain fruits and vegetables, don’t give up hope. Here are some ways to make fruits and vegetables more appealing. Many fruits and vegetables taste great with a dip or dressing. Use low fat yogurt for fruit or low fat ranch for vegetables. Mix fruits and vegetables in with foods you all ready love.
If you’re grilling steaks, marinate fresh bell peppers, onion, and squash and throw them on the grill as well. Try different textures of fruits and vegetables. If you’re not a fan of bananas or cooked carrots try crispy raw broccoli or fresh apples. Especially during the summer, there is a wide variety of fruits and vegetables available. Be creative and keep trying different ones until you find what you love!

If money is tight, buy seasonal fruits and vegetables from a local farmers market or grocery store. Canned, frozen, or dried fruits and vegetables are sometimes more affordable than fresh produce. This is a good option when money is tight, time is short, or your favorite fruit or vegetable is out of season. Also, many vegetables can be added to any dish like casseroles or soups to increase the volume, feeding more people at a lower cost. Growing your own fruits and vegetables can also cut down on cost. Get children involved to increase their interest in different fruits and vegetables. Let them choose which ones you will plant. They will take pride in the garden and their health will reap the benefits.

Whether you grown your own, support local farmers, or buy from a grocer, take advantage of the diverse selection of seasonal fruits and vegetables and eat to a healthier life! To learn more about the health benefits of fruits and vegetables, more ways to incorporate them into your diet, and local nutrition education programs available in your area, contact your local County Extension Agent at [insert contact information here].