

# Outside the Bowl

A little prep goes a long way to giving your fruit more kid appeal

by MADELEINE GREY

Every week, Korin Kealey's Ottawa clan polishes off two dozen apples, two big bunches of bananas, a bag of pears, a pineapple, two cantaloupes and "a couple of bags of whatever is seasonal." But it was the day her three kids, aged seven, six and two polished off an entire pineapple and cantaloupe in one go that she knew their fruit-loving appetites were truly voracious.

"It was an accident," says Kealey, who had peeled, sliced and diced the two big fruits onto a platter with plans to put out just half — for economy's sake. Then Kealey got distracted, left the room, and the platter's contents disappeared into three happy tummies during a ravenous after-school snack session.

"If fruit is out for them, my kids will eat it," says Kealey. "They're easy — they'll eat anything."

Are her kids truly easy, or is Kealey on to something?

"Many parents buy fresh fruit, then they put it away, usually in the crisper where it is out of sight and out of mind," says registered dietitian Mary Ellen Deane of Muskoka-Parry Sound Health Unit. "But if you want kids to eat fruit every day — if you want to make that the norm — it needs to be visible, prepped and in their face."

The Heart and Stroke Foundation reports that only one in five Canadian children is eating the recommended daily minimum of five servings of fruit and vegetables.

This statistic concerns Deane who focuses much of her work on creating healthy school nutrition.

In other words, life *can* be a bowl of cherries (or melon balls, mango slices or pineapple chunks) when you are

four years old and some delicious, prepared fruit awaits at eye level. While children may avoid dipping into a fruit

bowl on the kitchen counter, chances are they will plunge into a dish of sliced or cubed fruit put out at meal or snack

## Dippity-doo Fruit Kebabs

You can buy 12 in. (30 cm) bamboo skewers and cut them in half with scissors to make these kid-friendly kebabs. A blunt end will still work when threading the fruit. In fact, you may want to blunt any remaining points before serving to small children.

- 1 cup (250 mL) strawberries, hulled and halved
- 1 cup (250 mL) each pineapple chunks and mango chunks, about the size of an eraser

### DIP

- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup (175 mL) low-fat vanilla yogurt
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup (50 mL) low-fat granola
- 2 tbs (30 mL) unsweetened shredded coconut

Take a 6 in. (15 cm) long skewer and thread with 2 pieces each of strawberry, pineapple and mango. Repeat with remaining 5 skewers. In a small bowl, combine yogurt, granola and coconut. *Makes six 6 in. (15 cm) skewers.*

**TIP:** Try any fruit with these: Melon cubes, kiwi, apples, pears, grapes, even mandarin sections work! One skewer is a serving of fruit for kids 6 and up.

*Our recipe tester, Adell Shneer, tests our Nutrition column using both imperial and metric measurements. However, proportions in the metric version may differ slightly from the original, causing small variations in the result.*

### The Dish on Portions

calories	85
protein	2.5 g
fat	2.3 g
fibre	1.9 g
calcium	6% of RDA
vitamin A	9% of RDA
vitamin C	30% of RDA



## Powerful Picks

While there's no single fruit that will deliver all the nutrients you need in one bite, some fruits do score higher than others.

- The Center for Science in the Public Interest lists guava, watermelon, pink or red grapefruit, kiwi, cantaloupe, papaya, apricots, oranges and strawberries as "gold medalists" due to their high quantities of carotenoids (including beta carotene, lycopene, lutein and zeaxanthin), vitamin C, folate, potassium and fibre.
- Down at the bottom of the list of 47 fruits appear two kid-friendly favourites: applesauce and fruit cocktail. That doesn't mean we should nix them from kids' diets. Applesauce is high in fibre and fruit cocktail (best drained of any sugary syrup) still offers an array of valuable vitamins and minerals. (Check out the guide at [cspinet.org/nah/fantfruit.htm](http://cspinet.org/nah/fantfruit.htm).)



time. An orange or banana is less likely to disappear from a lunch box than cored and sliced pears sprinkled with orange juice (to prevent browning), kiwi slices or mandarin sections.

"We've seen the results in our breakfast programs," says Deane. Whole apples are left untouched. But when apples are washed, peeled and quartered, the response is "huge compliance." Kealey has seen similar results with her "easy" kids. "You have to market fruit to your kids," she says. So during a family trip to the Maritimes, Kealey created "PEI treats" — slices of banana, spread with peanut butter and topped with grape halves. The name stuck and so did the snack.

"Kids need to eat fruit every day," says Deane. "Fruit is a rich source of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and fibre, which help reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease, childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes."

Fortunately, most kids love fruit — at least in the beginning. A child's innate sweet tooth makes fruit more appealing than vegetables. While good nutrition includes both fruit and vegetables, it's nice to know that picky eaters can get comparable nutrition from just fruit. In other words, fruit boasts more than just vitamin C; it is loaded with all the same nutrients as vegetables.

Half a mango, for instance, has more than twice as much vitamin A as a cup

of raw broccoli. A cup of raspberries has double the fibre of a cup of cooked green beans. One medium banana contains the same potassium as a cup of cooked zucchini. And just half a cup of orange juice holds more folate than half a cup of cooked cabbage.

The moral of the story is variety. The best way to get a whole bunch of nutrients is to enjoy a rainbow of fruit. Kids can go on food jags and parents can get into a rut buying the "same old" every week, yet it's best to shake up the fruit scene in your household by eating a wide variety, from pomegranates to honeydew melon to Korean pears. If visions of high food bills blur that goal — fresh *imported* fruit can be expensive — turn to canned, frozen and dried fruits more often. Contrary to popular belief, there is no sacrifice in nutrition.

Fibre-rich berries, such as blueberries, strawberries, blackberries and raspberries, are readily available frozen — perfect for smoothies, baking or a brisk topping on yogurt, ice cream, even morning cereal. Some kids love to eat them frozen (but best after age three, due to choking hazards).

Dried fruit, such as raisins, dates, figs, apricots, apple rings, peaches, pears and dried plums (formerly called prunes until California marketing gurus gave them a makeover), offer a big dose of fibre and energy (a.k.a. calories). Drying reduces the water content, which increases the proportion of vitamins

## An apple a day?

Five to 10 servings of fruit and vegetables a day is the max in *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*. Those numbers can intimidate anyone confused about serving sizes especially for kids. Here's what the guide recommends:

For children under age 6:

- ¼ to ½ cup (50 to 125 mL) of berries, or diced fresh, frozen or canned fruit
- ½ to 1 medium-sized fruit
- 2 tbsp to ¼ cup (30 to 50 mL) dried fruit

For children aged 6 and up:

- ½ cup (125 mL) berries, or diced fresh, frozen or canned fruit
- 1 medium-sized fruit
- ¼ cup (50 mL) dried fruit

and nutrients (except vitamin C, which is sometimes reduced). You get a bigger bang for your nutritional buck with dried fruit. You also get a food high in sugar and calories, so serving sizes need to be smaller.

Ditto with fruit juice. Deane says kids today are "over-juiced" and parents are pouring the stuff a little too liberally. While pure 100-percent juice does have valuable nutrients, it's better for kids to eat fruit (and reap fibre and other healthy compounds) than drink it. Deane recommends only 4 to 6 oz. (½ to ¾ cup) per day for children six and under, and 8 to 12 ounces (1 to 1½ cups) per day for children seven and up.

Of course, fruit never falls far from the tree and, in the Kealey household, all three kids keep a close eye on whatever their apple-loving dad, Liam, eats. "If he eats it," says Korin Kealey, "then they all want it." Which means everyone in the family can benefit from such fruitful habits. ♥

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