The best buys for your shopping list—the produce section

The produce section means that whatever you buy from that section of your local grocery, you should be good to go, right?

Fresh fruits and veggies are filled with vitamins, minerals and antioxidants needed to support a healthy body. However, some fruits and veggies are going to give you a better bang to your health for your buck. Buyer beware too, there are a few things you should stay away from in this section.

For instance, some health food imposters include pre-sliced packaged fruit, iceberg lettuce and bottled smoothies.

First, pre-sliced fruit in packages is more expensive than the whole fruit, and its cut edges expose the fruit or veggie to more oxygen, causing it to be at risk for nutrient loss.

Iceberg lettuce is very popular; however, it is the least nutrient-dense lettuce. The darker green and leafier varieties will give you more nutritional bang.

Finally, bottled smoothies are often sweetened with sugar or nutritionally poor juices like apple or pear. They also cost much more than making your own smoothies fresh.

So, the key to shopping the produce section is to make sure that your cart is becoming colored. The more there are different colors of fruits and vegetables in your cart, the more antioxidants and nutrients you are going to get. Here is a list of what to look for in each color group:

—Red. Beets are high in nitrates that help your muscles work more effectively by reducing the amount of oxygen they need. Raspberries have eight grams of fiber in a single cup, which helps you maintain a healthy body weight and digestive system.

—Green. Kale is rich in vitamins C and K and beta-carotene for the eyes.

Avocado is 70 percent monounsaturated fat, making it a heart-healthy food. With seven grams of fiber, it will also fill you up.

—Yellow and orange. Sweet potato has three times your daily need for immune-boosting vitamin A in just one potato. It also keeps energy stores up as a complex carbohydrate.

Mango is high in vitamin C, which can help reduce upper-respiratory infections and help lower your heart rate during exercise. Seventy-five percent of your daily vitamin C requirement can be met with one cup of mango.

—Blue and purple. Eggplant is very low in calories and gives heart-protective qualities with its antioxidant properties.

Plums have antioxidant power like blueberries. Antioxidants are important for preventing muscle tissue damage, assist in exercise recovery and boost immunity.

—White. Bananas provide quick-digesting carbs while providing potassium necessary for muscle contraction. Low levels of potassium have been linked to muscle cramping.

Tofu is a low-fat protein source which is inexpensive. Tofu is commonly added to stir-fry, chili or pasta sauce.

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