

# Fresh Fruits & Vegetables

The other day my nurse-friend Kelly, grabbed my hand and asked, “Are you still on your diet program?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Today I heard something about free oxygen radicals causing skin damage.”

“I did not know that you were worried about your skin. I thought that you wanted to lose weight.”

“Well! I was . . .”

“What do you mean by ‘Well, I was’?” I asked.

“If you finish writing your book, maybe I can take a second look at your diet program,” she said.

“What do you want to know?” I pressed.

“What are oxygen free radicals?” she quizzed.

“I call them rascals, because they account for most of the skin, organ, and/or blood vessel damage. The blood vessel damage initiates the hardening (arteriosclerosis) process in the arteries that ultimately leads to their total blockage, resulting in a heart attack, stroke, or kidney failure. The skin damage leads to wrinkles, loss of texture, and aging,” I paused.

“How do I counteract the effects of oxygen free radicals?”

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“Free radicals are constantly produced in our body cells during the routine metabolic processes of converting food into energy. The free radicals such as superoxide, peroxy radicals, hydroxyl radicals, and peroxynitrite are very destructive in nature. They cause skin damage, arterial wall damage, and organ damage. The damaging effects of free radicals can be partially neutralized or prevented by regularly supplying antioxidants in our diet.”

“How do antioxidants work?”

“Antioxidants attach themselves to the free oxygen radicals and convert them into harmless objects.”

“Can you name some antioxidants?” She questioned.

“Vitamin A, C, and E, Zinc, Magnesium, and Selenium have antioxidant properties. Flavonoids also have strong antioxidant properties.”

“How do I get these antioxidants?”

“Do you want the easy route or the more practical route?”

“Give me the easy route first. If I don't like it, I don't have to waste my time on the more complicated one!” she said.

“Maybe I should not even have asked the question to begin with. Most drug stores carry antioxidant formulas. Generally speaking, you can take 2-4 capsules per day. But a better way to get your antioxidants is through careful selection of fresh fruits and dark leafy vegetables.”

“How do fruits and vegetables come into this picture?”

“That is a good question. Most vitamins and minerals come from plant sources. Fresh fruits and vegetables naturally are excellent sources of antioxidants, minerals, and phytochemicals. Phytochemicals counteract the effect of harmful chemicals. In addition, fresh fruits and vegetables contain fiber, enzymes, and flavonoids.”

“Nik, what are flavonoids?” Kelly enquired.

“Flavonoids are a group of chemicals, found in some fruits, that neutralize the effect of oxygen free radicals. Flavonoids are also found in darkly pigmented vegetables.”

“Can you give me some examples of foods containing flavonoids?”

“Tomatoes, green leafy vegetables, cantaloupes, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, grape seeds, and red, yellow or blue bell pepper— just to name a few.”

“But, Nik, don't fruits contain sugar?”

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“That is an excellent question, and you’re absolutely right! Most fruits do contain carbohydrates. That is one of the reasons why I recommend my patients to replace part of their breads, rice, and pasta servings with fresh fruits and vegetables.”

“Oh! Does that mean no more bread, rice, or pasta?”

“The less you eat of these items, the better it is for your skin, organs, and blood vessels.”

“Okay, Doc. Now let me ask you something else. Why do you recommend fresh fruits over fruit juices?”

“Look at their composition. Fruit juices are basically liquid extracts of fruits. When you squeeze a fresh orange or a tangerine, you get orange or tangerine juice. But what you are leaving in the pulp is more important than what is filling the cup! The pulp contains minerals, enzymes, and fiber, among other things. Keep in mind that fruit juices sold in the super markets may have added preservatives to increase their shelf life and sugar to enhance their taste. So, let me ask you a question. Would you rather drink just the carbohydrate content of a fruit or have the whole fresh fruit with its complete advantages?”

“That makes sense. You are saying, go for the fresh fruits whenever there is a choice, right?”

“Actually, if you do not have a choice, settle for a glass of skim milk instead of bottled fruit juice,” I emphasized.

“But I don’t like skim milk,” Kelly whined. “Why can’t I just have the orange juice?”

“Well, let me explain my logic behind this. A glass of fruit juice contains mostly carbohydrates, some of which are pure sugar. On the other hand, eight ounces of skim milk contain 8-9 grams of proteins, 11 grams of carbohydrates, calcium, and zero grams of fat.”

“You just said carbohydrates found in milk also. What makes these carbs any better than the carbs in fruit juice?” she quizzed.

“Smart question! Fruits contain fructose that has a GI of 50. No doubt, fruit juice has a carbohydrate with a lesser GI than rice or potatoes. However, fruits do not have the protein contained in skim milk. In addition, fruit juices have 25-30 grams of carbohydrates while skim milk has only 11 grams of carbohydrates.”

“Well, okay, I guess I can see why I should stick to the skim milk—”

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“Wait a minute! Did you finally think for once that I was right?” I interjected.

“Not exactly, so don't get your hopes up! But as I was going to say before I was *interrupted*, you said something earlier about vegetables being good, and I wanted to know about that. How do vegetables help us fight against aging and heart disease?”

“Vegetables contain soluble fiber which lowers blood cholesterol levels. They also add bulk and fill you up more than bread or rice. Best of all, they have less calories, gram per gram, than carbohydrates or proteins. As mentioned before, fresh fruits and vegetables have antioxidants that prevent arterial damage and plaque buildup.”

“So, what kind of vegetables do you recommend?”

“Make dark green leafy vegetables such as Romaine lettuce part of your daily lunch and/or dinner meals. The darker the color, the more antioxidants they contain. Add a teaspoon of olive oil, which is also known to lower cholesterol, to any leafy salad. Sprinkle a little salt and pepper on it, and squeeze half a lemon on top of that. Now you have the best salad in town sitting right in front of you for your delight.”

“That is it?”

“Oh! Did I mention slices of red and yellow bell peppers?”

“But, Nik, you must be out of your mind! Most of us do not have time to prepare salads for lunch and dinner.”

“You bring up an excellent point. That is why God created weekends. Select dark green leafy vegetables, colorful bell peppers, and berries of all kinds on your weekend shopping trips to the supermarket. Spend a few minutes on Sunday afternoons, after returning from your lunch, to chop up the leafy vegetables, bell peppers, and mix those ingredients together with the berries. Divide the salad into daily portion servings and fill Ziploc bags with the salad. When you come home from work each day, take out one packet of this salad mixture from the fridge, add to it salt and pepper, a teaspoon of olive oil, and lemon juice. How long is this going to take you to prepare— maybe one minute? Two minutes? Or three minutes?”

“I guess you do not take ‘I cant, *I don't want to*, I do not feel like eating that, or I hate grass,’ for an answer, do you?”

“Should I?” I asked.

“I hate it when you answer a question with a question.”

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“I know it hurts, but do you want to appear younger, feel healthier, and look slimmer?”

“Of course I do! Otherwise, why would I be wasting all this time with you?”

“Then let me suggest a strong, motivational tip.”

“What is that?”

“Type this statement, ‘I want to eat fruits and vegetables because I want to appear—, so I love to eat fresh fruits and vegetables.’”

“What if I say that I don’t know how to type?”

“You are lying, ‘cause I know you can type! Otherwise, you would not have this job. You must have calluses on your fingertips spending eight hours a day beating-up the laptop keyboards, and call it nursing job! At least, can you read your own handwriting?”

“Is that a question?”

“Good, ‘cause I can’t. Otherwise I would have written it for you.”

“Oh, very funny Nik! Don’t even get me started on your handwriting.”

“Anyway, write this statement ‘I want to eat fruits and vegetables because I want to appear . . . So I love to eat fresh fruits and vegetables,’ in your own handwriting, using bold letters, on a 3x5 card, and stick it onto the refrigerator on top of all those fast-food delivery coupons you have posted.”

“How did you know that I have fast-food coupons on my refrigerator?”

“Well, I also used to. But that was before I learned of the benefits of including fresh fruits and vegetables in my daily dietary regimen.”

“Now can you give me a shopping list so that I do not have to walk around with your book in the grocery store, looking like a vegetable geek.”

“I can feel your pain, but do not despair. I have created a separate chart consisting of a list of carefully selected items. Just carry a copy of this in your handbag and keep it there until the ink turns illegible. Then, make another copy from the book to replace the old one. This will enable you to look like an intelligent, educated shopper.”

“What do you mean by an intelligent, educated shopper? I shop alone most of the time. Are you suggesting that someone is watching me?”

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“Of course people are watching you all the time. Just because you are walking around with blinders over your eyes (and life) does not mean that the world is not watching you. Let me ask you a question. If no one is watching you, why do you want to loose weight and look slim? Why are you listening to me?”

“Because I want to feel and look good for myself.

“Then what is wrong with looking like an intelligent and educated shopper for yourself?

“You are nuts!”

Well! I am giving you the *nuts and bolts* of a healthier, slimmer, younger-looking, and a heart-healthy lifestyle. You have to make up your own mind if you want. Sitting in a church is not going to make you Christian, anymore than sitting in a chicken house is going to make you a chicken.”

“What do you mean?”

“People who just think and wish are dime a dozen and those who put their ideas into practice are priceless.”

“I did not know that you attended a theological seminary”

“Common sense, Kelly! Common sense, Kelly! That is what I have been trying to instill in your mind all this time. A well-balanced approach will go a long way in helping you achieve your desire.”

“Enough, enough, get back to the main point, I do not have all day long.”

“Well, when you meet one of your snobby friends, just unfold the long shopping list and make every effort to get their attention towards the shopping list.”

“Why?”

“What are friends for? Show them that you know a lot more than most other people when it comes to grocery shopping, and indeed you do. However, you do not want them to feel bad or inferior. Instead, you can use this opportunity to engage them in an uplifting, colorful, and intellectual conversation on how this shopping list has made a significant and positive change in your life. They will begin to pay attention and will be eager to know where you got that list. In the future, they may seek your advice on other heart-healthy lifestyle tips you have learned. Now you become an important resource for them. That should make you feel better about yourself and encourage you to stick with the *Nikam's Diet*.”

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“Is this one of your advertising plots? Who gave you this stupid idea?” Kelly asked.

“Believe me, it works. You might even make some new friends!”

“Get out of here!”

“Wait, I am not done. If you have a great idea, but you cannot share it with your family and friends, it is worthless!”

“What are you up to?”

“The next time you invite your friends and family over, keep a copy of the shopping list near your bar, cocktail tables, and the dining table. Let your guest soak in the list as they sip a glass of red wine. Speaking of which, red wine also has antioxidants.”

“Back to what you were saying, then what?”

“Serve them your antioxidant formulas for an appetizer— fresh fruits and vegetables.”

“Are you out of your mind?”

“You’re still listening to me, aren’t you?”

“Yes, ’cause I am trying to gage how much crazier you are going to get. But I’m about ready to leave, so what’s your fruity scoop for a healthy meal in a nutshell— no pun intended!”

Do you want me to give you a recipe for an enchanting evening dinner with your snobbies?”

“You might as well dish that out while we are here.”

“Start with a glass of red wine and a mixture of walnut or peanuts for an appetizer, all of which contain antioxidants. Decorate the dinner plate with the colorful salad—Romaine lettuce, multicolor bell peppers, strawberries, blackberries, and lemon. Then have your salad with 4 oz. of Cajun- or Tandoori-flavored grilled salmon along with asparagus and slices of cantaloupe.”

“What about the desert?”

“Oh, I had forgotten about the dessert. For dessert enjoy some soft music and a gentle dance.”

“And then?”

“Do you want to hear about pycnogenol?”

“What is pycnogenol?”

“Another powerful antioxidant. I suggest you read the chapter on Vitamins and Supplements.”

“I better get back my real job!”

“Goodbye, Kelly!”

## NIKAM'S DIET

### Heart-healthy Choices Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

#### **Vegetables:**

Red bell peppers  
Green bell peppers  
Yellow bell peppers  
Mushrooms  
Zucchini  
Romaine Lettuce  
Fresh spinach  
Broccoli  
Cauliflower  
Asparagus  
Cilantro  
Cucumbers  
Eggplant  
Tomatoes

#### **Beans:**

Kidney beans  
Chickpeas  
Peas  
Soybeans

#### **Fruits:**

Cantaloupe  
Grapefruit  
  
Blackberries  
Blueberries  
Raspberries  
Strawberries  
  
Peaches  
Nectarines  
Pears  
Plums  
Lemon  
Orange  
Olives  
Orange squash  
Garlic

#### **Nuts:**

Walnuts  
Almonds  
Hazel nuts