Fresh fruits and vegetables are a quick and healthy after-school snack for busy parents and hungry children. They are packed full of important nutrients and are naturally low in calories. The fruits and vegetables listed in this publication are easy to prepare—wash and eat, peel and eat, or wash, slice, and eat.

Keep in mind that it can take many tries before children will try a new fruit or vegetable. If dips are offered with the vegetables they should be healthy, such as low-fat dressing or hummus. It is also important for parents to be good role models and fill half their plates with fruits and vegetables too.

A GUIDE TO CHOOSING AND STORING PRODUCE

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FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLE BUYING AND STORING GUIDE

- Different varieties of fruits and vegetables may be available all-year round in the produce section because they can come from other parts of the country or world. Fruits and vegetables that are in season (peak season/peak of freshness) may cost less and taste better.
- Produce that produces ethylene (a natural gas) can cause ethylene-sensitive produce to ripen faster. Store produce that make ethylene away from produce that are sensitive to ethylene.
- Produce that make ethylene: apples, avocados, bananas, cantaloupe, nectarines, papayas, peaches, pears, plums, and tomatoes.
- Produce sensitive to ethylene: asparagus, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, chayotes, collard greens, grapefruit, green beans, kale, kiwifruit, lemons, lettuce, mangos, mushrooms, okra, oranges, persimmons, potatoes, spinach, watermelon, and yellow squash.
- If fresh fruits and vegetables are limited in your area, frozen or canned is another option. Frozen and canned fruits are as nutritious as fresh fruits and vegetables.
### Fresh Fruit and Vegetables for Busy Families:

#### Healthy Children | Back to School 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruit*</th>
<th>Buying Tips</th>
<th>Storage Tips</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| **Apples**      | Firm, shiny, smooth skin, stem attached<br><br>
*In season: September–May* | Refrigerate in plastic bags away from foods with strong odor; eat within 3 weeks.                   |
| **Apricots**    | Firm (not hard), plump, golden yellow<br><br>
*In season: June–July* | Ripen at room temperature, and then refrigerate in plastic bags; eat within 3–5 days.               |
| **Bananas**     | Firm, no bruises, yellow with slightly green stem and tips<br><br>
*In season: All year* | Ripen at room temperature. Ripened bananas can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks, but skin may turn black. |
| **Berries**     | Firm, plump, dry, dusty blue, similar in size<br><br>
*In season: June–August* | Refrigerate; eat within 10–14 days.                                                                   |
| **Berries**     | Firm, dry (check for mold), plump<br><br>
*In season: June–August* | Refrigerate; eat within 1–2 days. Wash when ready to eat.                                              |
| **Berries**     | Shiny, firm, bright red; green caps attached<br><br>
*In season: June–August* | Refrigerate; eat within 1–3 days. Wash when ready to eat.                                              |
| **Cherries**    | Firm, no blemishes, stems attached<br><br>
*In season: May–June* | Refrigerate; eat within 10 days.                                                                       |
| **Citrus fruit**| Firm, feels heavy for size, smooth, well rounded<br><br>
*In season: October–June* | Store at room temperature; eat within 1 week. Refrigerate; eat within 1–2 weeks.                     |
| **Citrus fruit**| Firm, feels heavy for size, skin not too rough<br><br>
*In season: November–June* | Store at room temperature; eat within 1–2 days. Refrigerate; eat within 1–2 weeks.                    |
| **Grapes**      | Firm, plump, attached to green stems<br><br>
*In season: June–December* | Refrigerate in plastic bag; eat within 7 days.                                                        |
| **Kiwi fruit**  | Slightly firm, rough and fuzzy skin<br><br>
*In season: June–August* | Refrigerate unripened up to 6 weeks.                                                                   |
| **Mangoes**     | Slightly firm, smooth skin often speckled with black<br><br>
*In season: April–August* | Store at room temperature; eat within 1–2 days. Refrigerate peeled, cut mangoes.                    |
| **Melon**       | Sweet smell; yellowish skin under the netting; stem end a little soft; feels heavy for size<br><br>
*In season: May–September* | Store whole melon at room temperature for up to 1 week. Refrigerate cut-up melon in airtight container; eat within 5 days. |
| **Melon**       | Sweet smell; creamy, yellow rinds; feels heavy for size<br><br>
*In season: February–October* | Store at room temperature; eat within 2 weeks.                                                        |
| **Melon**       | Yellow, cream-colored underside; symmetrical; dried stem; feels heavy for size<br><br>
*In season: May–August* | Store at room temperature; eat within a week. Refrigerate cut-up melon in airtight container; eat within 5 days. |
| **Nectarines**  | Firm, smooth skin<br><br>
*In season: June–September* | Ripen in paper bag at room temperature. Refrigerate ripe nectarines; eat within 1–2 days.          |
| **Papaya**      | Greenish yellow; slightly soft to touch when fruit is pressed in palm of hand<br><br>
*In season: All year* | Store at room temperature until yellow or orange; eat within 2–3 days.                                |
| **Peaches**     | Firm, fuzzy, no blemishes<br><br>
*In season: June–September* | Ripen in paper bag at room temperature. Refrigerate ripe nectarines; eat within 1–2 days.          |
| **Pears**       | Firm; ripe when stem can be gently moved; color creamy yellow to brown<br><br>
*In season: June–September* | Ripen at room temperature.                                                                          |
| **Pineapples**  | Golden yellow; slightly soft; dark-green leaves; ripe when a leaf can be easily taken off; heavy for size<br><br>
*In season: February–August* | Refrigerate cut pineapple; eat within 2–3 days.                                                        |
| **Plums**       | Plump, smooth skin, no blemishes. Avoid shriveled or hard plums.<br><br>
*In season: June–September* | Room temperature in paper bag until ripe. Refrigerate ripe.                                          |
### Fresh vegetables

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Fruit*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bell peppers</strong></td>
<td>Firm, brightly colored peppers (green, red, orange, yellow) with tight skin that are heavy for their size. Avoid dull, shriveled, or pitted peppers. <em>In season: All year</em></td>
<td>Refrigerate bell peppers in plastic bag for use within 5 days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Broccoli</strong></td>
<td>Firm, closed, dark-green florets; firm, tender stalks. <em>In season: October–May</em></td>
<td>Refrigerate 3–5 days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Carrots</strong></td>
<td>Firm; bright colored; smooth. No soft, wilted, or split. <em>In season: All year</em></td>
<td>Refrigerate in plastic bag; eat within 2 weeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cauliflower</strong></td>
<td>Bright-green leaves; firm creamy-white florets. No bruises or open florets; no brown spots. <em>In season: September–November</em></td>
<td>Refrigerate in plastic bag up to 5 days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Celery</strong></td>
<td>Fresh leaves, crisp branches. Light green. No wilts, rough look or puffy feel to stalk. <em>In season: All year</em></td>
<td>Refrigerate in plastic bag up to 1 week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cucumbers</strong></td>
<td>Bright, shiny dark green, firm, heavy for size. <em>In season: May–August</em></td>
<td>Refrigerate in plastic bag up to 1 week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tomato</strong></td>
<td>Firm, plump, no blemishes. <em>In season: May–August</em></td>
<td>Store at room temperature away from sunlight up to 1 week. Refrigerate if needed, but this will affect the taste.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Some fruits and vegetables can be a choking hazard for younger children. Do not feed children younger than 4 years round, firm food unless the food is completely chopped and children are able to chew properly.

FOOD SAFETY FIRST

Here are tips adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention “Tips for Fresh Produce Safety: Safe Handling of Raw Produce and Fresh-Squeezed Juices.”

Buying Tips
• Do not buy bruised or damaged produce.
• Make sure fresh-cut produce, such as a half a watermelon or bagged salad greens, are refrigerated or on ice.
• Put fresh fruits and vegetables in a different storage bag than meat, poultry, and seafood products.

Storage Tips
• Store perishable fresh fruits and vegetables, such as strawberries or lettuce, in a clean refrigerator with a temperature of 40°F or below.
• Refrigerate all precut or peeled produce.

Preparation Tips
• Always wash your hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap before and after preparing fresh produce. Children should wash their hands before and after snacks and meals.
• Cut away any damaged or bruised areas on fresh fruits and vegetables. Throw out rotten produce.
• All produce should be thoroughly washed before eating. Wash fruits and vegetables under running water just before eating, peeling, cutting, or cooking. Washing produce with soap or detergent or using commercial produce washes is not recommended.
• Many precut, bagged produce items like lettuce are prewashed. If the package states that the contents have been prewashed, you can use the produce without washing again.
• Scrub firm produce, such as melons and cucumbers, with a clean produce brush.
• Dry produce with a clean cloth towel or paper towel, which may help reduce bacteria that may be present.

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