Eat Your Fruits and Veggies!
By Megan Beck

This is for all my fellow college students living off campus who indulge in comfort food when the going gets tough and the work load seems to never end. This is for all of you that have forgotten what cooked spinach tastes like because French fries and chicken nuggets have invaded your plate.

It’s halfway through the semester and those YCMP swipes are running low, the motivation to cook has been wiped out by midterms and 10-page papers. The convenience of the dining hall seems like a long lost dream as you realize you’ve been living off the Costco-sized box of ramen noodles in your pantry along with Lucky Charms for the past few days. You have become a toast addict, pasta connoisseur and lover of all things frozen that can be ready to eat in less than 5 minutes. It is time to throw the Pop-Tarts in the trash and give your body what it really needs: fruits and vegetables.

For those of you that grew up on mushy green beans, over-cooked broccoli and rubbery carrots, I feel your pain. I realize that it is very hard to overcome the fear of bad cooking that has been conditioned into many people’s minds. The good news is that fruits and vegetables can be exciting and delicious if you know what to do with them and how to use their flavors to your advantage.

Eating more fruits and veggies have many benefits that include:

- Energy boosts
- Weight loss
- Immune system boosts

ENERGY BOOST!

Have you been dragging your feet to those 8 a.m. classes? Does 1 coffee turn into 6 by the end of the day? Eating more fruits and vegetables can increase your energy naturally without needing to drink excess caffeine. Examples of easy foods to add to your diet that will give you an energy boost include:

Sweet potatoes: These guys are loaded with vitamin A, C and carbohydrates! The microwave is a college kid’s best friend. Lucky for you bacon is not the only thing that cooks well in there-
sweet potatoes are a great snack and you can throw them in the microwave for 5 minutes and done! If you are feeling more adventurous you can throw in some butter and mash them like mashed potatoes or cut them into strips, toss them in olive oil and bake them for sweet potato fries!

**Bananas:** Not only are bananas full of potassium and fiber, they are mostly made up of sugars like glucose, fructose and sucrose which are great natural energy boosters!
Cut them up and put them in your cereal or oatmeal in the morning for another quick way to increase your fruit consumption.

**Apples:** Apples are also high in fiber and sugar. Smother in peanut butter or eat it plain; it’s perfect for an on-the-go snack.

**Oranges:** Oranges take more time for your body to break down so they provide a longer lasting energy boost. They also add vitamins C, and A to your diet along with calcium and fiber!

**Beans:** Beans are a complex carbohydrate that help maintain a constant and steady level of energy to fight of those mid-day sleepies!

**IMMUNE SYSTEM BOOST!**

Trying to battle a cold that won’t go away? Feeling too lousy to study for finals? Lack of sleep, stress and a poor diet are 3 main contributors to a compromised immune system. We always hear about fruits and vegetables being full of antioxidants but what does this actually mean? Imagine your body as a city where criminals are terrorizing the innocent people and it is up to the police officers to stop these criminals and protect the city from destruction. In this situation, free radicals act as criminals by damaging and destroying cells in your body. Antioxidants act as the police officers that save your cells and help your body fight disease—especially those icky colds! The 3 main antioxidants are beta-carotene (vitamin A), vitamin C and vitamin E. Here are some good examples of foods you can eat to boost immune health:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bell peppers</td>
<td>Red peppers, orange peppers, yellow peppers, whatever color peppers- they are ALL healthy and delicious. Eat them raw, throw them in your spaghetti sauce, put them in your sandwich, just eat them! These are loaded with vitamin C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carrots</td>
<td>Carrots are full of vitamin A. Baby carrots are a delicious snack you can dip in hummus, dressing or eat plain!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Broccoli</td>
<td>A great source of vitamin C! Takes ten minutes to steam or boil. All you need is a pot of boiling water and even better a steamer. Throw some butter, lemon juice and capers into a pan until it is all melted down and drizzle it over your broccoli like a salad dressing!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leafy greens</td>
<td>Leafy greens are all high in antioxidants! Branch out and try something new like kale or Swiss chard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>The best immune boosting fruits are cantaloupe, kiwi and all berries, mangoes, papayas, peaches and grapefruit. Almost all fruits have vitamin C in them so eat up!</td>
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**WEIGHT LOSS!**

Hopefully it’s no secret that adding more fruits and veggies to your diet can help you lose weight. Skip the fad diets, weight loss shakes and short cuts and pack in those leafy greens, beans and berries. To lose weight you need to burn more calories than you are eating. Almost all fruits and vegetables are very low in calories, fat and salt but high in vitamins and minerals! Here are some quick tips on how to replace daily foods with fruits and vegetables that will ultimately help you cut your calorie, fat and salt intake and help you lose weight:

**Breakfast:**
Replace some of the meat and cheese in your omelet or egg scramble with spinach, peppers, mushrooms, onions or broccoli! This will not only make your omelet healthier, it will add lots of yummy flavors.

Add some berries or a banana to your cereal or oatmeal in the morning.

Replace your normal breakfast with this fruit and veggie smoothie:
Here’s my own personal recipe for an easy smoothie you can throw together in the morning. It even has 3 servings of fruits and vegetables!

- 1 1/2 cups mixed frozen berries
- 1 cup fresh spinach (no whining, fresh spinach has almost no taste and melts into the berry goodness that is this smoothie.)
- 1/2 cup of plain Greek yogurt
- 1 cup of orange juice or milk - you choose!
- 1 banana

Lunch:
Create a special salad! Salads can be boring and tasteless but they can also be full of fun and surprising treats! Add some apples, candied walnuts, cranberries and gorgonzola cheese to a bed of spinach with balsamic dressing and you are in salad heaven. Get creative - the more ingredients you use, the more flavor your salad will have.

Replace mayonnaise and other sauces with hummus and guacamole. Hummus is a great replacement for mayo in tuna sandwiches - it adds a creamy texture without all those saturated fats! You can make your own guacamole or buy it from the store and it adds a delicious boost of smooth avocado to your dish.

Dinner:
If you are a big meat eater and love burgers, try replacing a beef burger with a veggie burger or even a Portobello mushroom! Mushrooms have the meatiest texture of all the vegetables.

Puree a veggie medley and sneak it into your sauces. Pureed cauliflower and broccoli go great in macaroni and cheese sauce. Pureed peppers, tomatoes, onions, garlic and carrots add some zing to pasta sauce!