

Selecting Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

—Amanda Scott*

Fresh fruits and vegetables provide vitamins, minerals and fiber to help keep your body healthy. To make sure that your fruits and vegetables are safe to eat, it is important to know how to select good-quality produce.

Occasionally, fresh fruits and vegetables can become contaminated by harmful bacteria or viruses, which are also known as pathogens. Examples of pathogens include *Salmonella*, *E. coli* 0157:H7 and Hepatitis A. Produce can be contaminated at any point, from the field to your table.

If you eat a contaminated fruit or vegetable, it could make you ill. Common signs of foodborne illness include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache and fever. These symptoms usually appear within 12 to 72 hours after you have eaten contaminated food.

When buying fresh fruits and vegetables, choose those that have a good shape, texture and color and a fresh smell. It is best

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to shop for fresh produce often and buy only what you will use within a few days. This will cut down on the amount wasted because of spoilage.

Do not buy fresh produce that is moldy, bruised or injured or that shows signs of insect damage. Handle produce gently to avoid bruising and other damage. Bruises and cuts may allow pathogens to enter a fruit or vegetable and cause it to spoil quickly.

When buying pre-cut or prepackaged fruits and vegetables, make sure they are refrigerated or surrounded by ice at the grocery store. Avoid damaged items and open or torn packages.

Be sure to check the use-by dates on packages of pre-cut fruits and vegetables. Choose the freshest items, and eat them by the use-by date.

Selecting quality fruits and vegetables may take a few more minutes, but it will be well worth your time.

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