

Science-backed ‘food is medicine’ movement may reverse American health decline

By

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As the health of Americans continues to decline, researchers at the University of Florida are urging a national rethink about [fruits and vegetables](#).

Their message is that it’s time to treat produce not just as food but as medicine.

In a recent article published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, the researchers endorse the “food is medicine” movement, arguing fruits and vegetables play a crucial role in [preventing chronic diseases](#) and improving public health.

Yet only one in 10 adults in the U.S. consumes the recommended daily servings – a shortfall researchers claim is fueling the crisis.

The article warns that current U.S. agricultural output is insufficient to support a healthy population.

To address this gap, the authors advocate for a substantial increase in fruit and vegetable production, with a focus on nutrient-dense produce such as berries, leafy greens and carrots.

Danielle Treadwell, an associate professor of horticultural sciences at the University of Florida, spoke to Fox News Digital about her involvement in the study.

“In the U.S., we have a healthcare crisis, due in large part to dietary choices,” she said.

Treadwell defined horticulture as “the art and science of fruit production and vegetable production” — integral to expanding the quantity and quality of produce in the U.S.

“In the U.S., we have a healthcare crisis, due in large part to dietary choices,” Danielle Treadwell, an associate professor of horticultural sciences at the University of Florida, said.MNStudio

“Where are all those fruits and vegetables going to come from?” Treadwell said. “Because currently, the United States is only able to produce 50% of what we anticipate we would need if every adult in the U.S. were to follow the dietary advice of eating five servings of fruits and vegetables a day.”

She added, “That is not enough.”

Treadwell cited common barriers to eating more produce, including the time required to prepare them and limited access — especially in underserved areas.

“Here in Florida, we grow fruits and vegetables nine months out of the year [and] many of us have citrus trees in our yard,” the horticulturist said. “However, that’s not true in other parts of the country.”

Treadwell also observed that many Americans work “very long hours, sometimes multiple jobs.”

She added, “All of these things can come together and really [have] an impact on how many servings a day [of produce that] the average adult can take in.”

“Frozen vegetables, by and large, retain 100% of their nutritional content that they had when they left the field.”

Treadwell’s main advice is to choose what you eat wisely and to start out small.

“Remember that a serving is half a cup ... so maybe, eat a whole cup at a time,” she suggested. “It certainly doesn’t necessarily have to be fresh. Frozen vegetables, by and large, retain 100% of their nutritional content that they had when they left the field.”

So if food can be medicine, which specific fruits and vegetables target certain ailments?

Dr. William W. Li, author of the book “Eat to Beat Disease: The New Science of How Your Body Can Heal Itself,” shared some examples with Fox News Digital.

He cited pears and strawberries as two fruits that can target specific medical conditions.

“Frozen vegetables, by and large, retain 100% of their nutritional content that they had when they left the field,” Treadwell said. Recebin – stock.adobe.com

“Pears contain polyphenols like quercetin and chlorogenic acid that can reduce blood pressure, shrink body fat, improve energy balance and reverse metabolic syndrome,” Li said.

Strawberries, on the other hand, contain “polyphenols such as ellagic acid and anthocyanins that can decrease insulin resistance in obese persons to improve metabolism.”

Pears and strawberries are two fruits that can target specific medical conditions.

For those with a high amount of “bad” LDL cholesterol and stubborn abdominal fat, the doctor suggested the monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs) in avocados.

Blueberries can also help “reduce body weight, increase insulin sensitivity, shrink visceral fat and improve metabolism,” Li said.

According to dietitian Yaa Boakye, the healing powers of fruits and vegetables come from consistently incorporating them into your lifestyle. Jacob Lund – stock.adobe.com

Yaa Boakye, a dietitian based in Illinois, echoed the notion of the healing powers of fruits and vegetables.

“Physiological shifts happen when fruits and vegetables become a daily, consistent part of your life,” Boakye told Fox News Digital. “Not once a week. Not a once-a-month juice cleanse, but consistency.”

She also said that diet is one of many factors in a person’s health and encouraged Americans to be well-balanced in their approaches to health.

“Stress, sleep, trauma, environment, medications, access — they all matter, too,” Boakye said. “If nutrition is your shield, then movement, sleep and emotional regulation are your armor, reinforcements and escape routes.”

Boakye said Americans should make eating produce a habit.

“We are what we repeatedly do,” Boakye said.

“Eating fruits and vegetables can’t be an afterthought or a luxury. They must be a non-negotiable part of our daily diet.”