



Have the flu? Eating citrus perfectly OK

I read on some website that people with the flu should avoid citrus fruits because they could make the illness worse. Is there any truth to that?

No. Citrus fruits such as oranges, tangerines and grapefruit are perfectly fine to eat if you're ill with the flu.

Of course, if you're very ill, you might not feel much like eating anything. But if you have the flu, don't hesitate to have a piece of citrus fruit if you wish. Guidance for battling the flu always includes drinking plenty of fluids; orange or grapefruit juice are perfectly fine options. And citrus fruits are chock-full of vitamins and antioxidants; they may even give you some energy to help you feel better.

It could be that whoever wrote the blurb you read online was confused between influenza and what's commonly known as the "stomach flu." The stomach flu isn't really the flu at all, but gastroenteritis. Medline Plus, an online health information service of the U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus>), explains that the flu primarily attacks the respiratory system, while gastroenteritis focuses on the intestines.

With gastroenteritis, guidance always includes letting your stomach settle by stopping any food or beverage intake (including citrus fruits and juices) for at least a few hours.

Follow with drinking or sipping clear liquids, and then introducing bland, easy-on-the-stomach foods such as toast, broth, bananas, apple sauce or rice. Foods to avoid while battling abdominal problems include dairy products, caffeine and alcohol. Citrus fruits, tomato products, carbonated beverages, and high-fat or greasy foods are also often mentioned as foods to avoid when you have gastroenteritis because they could be hard on a sensitive gut.

When you're not sick, eating citrus fruit regularly, along with a variety of other fruits and vegetables in a balanced diet, can go a long way to giving your body the defenses it needs to stay healthy. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that adults consume 2 to 2.5 cups of fruit a day for good health. A small orange or a medium-sized tangerine (either about 2.5 inches in diameter) or half of a medium-sized grapefruit (four inches in diameter) all count as a half-cup of fruit.

Besides being high in vitamin C and fiber, citrus fruits contain a variety of other nutrients. Oranges are high in thiamin, folate and potassium, and tangerines and pink or red grapefruit are good sources of vitamin A. Citrus fruits also have a variety of beneficial phytochemicals, including flavonoids and carotenoids.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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By Martha Filipic

614-292-9833

filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu

Editor:

This column was reviewed by Sarah Clark, dietetic intern in the Department of Human Nutrition in the College of Education and Human Ecology.

**Section of Communications
and Technology**

News and Media Relations

2021 Coffey Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1044
614-292-2011

208 Research Services
Building
1680 Madison Ave.
Wooster, OH 44691-4096
330-263-3780

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