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For Better Living
Veggies - A Quick and Healthy Choice

The new American Heart Association Diet and Lifestyle Recommendations emphasize making practical, small changes. Several of these recommendations focus on eating fruits and vegetables:

- * Choose fresh, frozen and canned vegetables and fruits without high-calorie sauces and added salt and sugars.
- * Select fruits and vegetables more often instead of other high-calorie foods.
- * Choose fruits and vegetables more often to increase daily fiber intake.
- * Choose whole fruits and vegetables more often than juices.

Fruits and vegetables are considered a nutritional bargain because they are loaded with natural nutrients and fiber without all the calories. To make it easier to choose veggies more often, take a short-cut and buy veggies that are ready-to-eat. No-chop veggies like baby carrots, cherry tomatoes, broccoli and cauliflower florets and sugar snap peas can be ready to eat as quickly as other higher calorie, less nutritious options.

Most of the time, fresh produce is recommended over canned and frozen varieties. One exception is when it comes to lycopene, which is recommended for its antioxidant properties and its role in prostate cancer prevention and other chronic diseases. Lycopene is absorbed more readily in the cooked form and is found in tomato based foods - juice, sauce, paste and ketchup.

Research has shown that eating lots of fruits and vegetables can make a significant contribution to lowering blood pressure and improving other risk factors for cardiovascular disease including stroke. Stroke is the third leading cause of death and the most common cause of disability. A recent study showed that eating five servings or more a day of fruits and vegetables may also reduce the risk of stroke.

Researchers analyzed results from eight large population studies totaling more than 275,000 people over 13 years to determine the relationship between fruit and vegetable intake and incidence of stroke. The individuals who consumed three to five servings had an 11 percent less risk of stroke. Those who ate more than five servings per day had a 26 percent less risk when compared to those who ate less than three servings of fruits and vegetables per day. The authors' conclusions agreed with the current recommendations to consume more than five servings of fruit and vegetables each day for major stroke risk reduction.

There is one cautionary note if you're watching your caloric intake. Whole fruit gives you a bigger portion than the same fruit in dried form for the same number of calories. For example, a small box of raisins (one-quarter cup) is about 100 calories. For the same number of calories, you can eat 1 cup of grapes.

Take advantage of the seasonal availability of fruits and vegetables - this will make them more affordable. As we enter fall, those that are at their peak and most plentiful include apples,

broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, collards, grapes, kale, pears, persimmons, pumpkins, winter squash and yams. Most important, choose a variety because of the different nutrients available among them, including vitamins C, A, E, thiamin, niacin, B-6, and folic acid along with minerals and dietary fiber.

Honey Lime Fruit Toss

1 can (20 ozs.) unsweetened pineapple chunks
1 can (11 ozs.) mandarin oranges, drained
2 cups sliced fresh strawberries
2 medium firm bananas, cut into 1/4 " slices
2 kiwifruit, peeled, halved and sliced
2 tablespoons lime juice
1 tablespoon honey
1/4 teaspoon grated lime peel

Drain pineapple, reserving 1/4 cup juice. Set aside. In a bowl, combine the pineapple, mandarin oranges, strawberries, bananas and kiwi. In a small bowl, combine the lime juice, honey, lime peel and reserved pineapple juice. Pour over fruit. Gently toss to coat. Yield: 6 servings