

# Fruits and Vegetables for Disease Prevention

## *Keys to preventing chronic conditions*

Eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables is not only important for maintaining weight and general health, but it actually helps prevent chronic diseases and conditions, including:

### **Cardiovascular Disease**

Heart disease is the world's leading killer. All fruits and vegetables are good choices for the prevention of heart disease and stroke, but the best choices are green leafy vegetables and citrus fruits.

### **High Blood Pressure and High Cholesterol**

High blood pressure is a primary risk factor for heart disease and stroke. How fruits and vegetables lower cholesterol is still a bit of a mystery. However, some experts think that the soluble fiber in them helps block the absorption of cholesterol from other foods.

### **Cancer**

It appears that eating more fruit likely lowers the risk of cancers of the esophagus, stomach and lungs, and reduces the risk of cancers of the mouth, pharynx, colon-rectum, larynx, kidney and bladder.

### **Gastrointestinal Conditions**

Indigestible fiber that comes from fruits and vegetables is important for preventing intestinal ailments. As fiber passes through the digestive system, it soaks up water and expands. This can calm irritable bowels and decrease pressure inside the intestinal tract.

### **Cataracts and Macular Degeneration**

Usually related to aging, a cataract is the gradual clouding of the eye's lens. Macular degeneration is damage to the center of the retina. Dark green leafy vegetables contain two pigments (lutein and zeaxanthin) that aid in protecting the eye. And the Vitamin A found in carrots, cantaloupe and pumpkin aids in night vision.

### **Birth Defects**

Neural tube defects (NTDs) are major defects of a baby's brain or spine. Folate (folic acid) is a B

vitamin used in the body to make new cells. Most NTDs can be prevented if a woman has enough of this in her body before becoming pregnant. Folic acid is found in asparagus, cooked spinach and certain fortified breakfast cereals.

Other diseases and conditions that can be prevented are coronary artery disease and osteoporosis, as well as dental problems and skin infections. The next time you get hungry, consider a fruit or vegetable!



## **10-Minute Recipe: Apple-Tuna Sandwich**

Mix two, 6-oz. cans of unsalted tuna in water with 1 medium chopped apple, 1 chopped celery stalk, ¼ cup low-fat plain yogurt, 1 tsp. mustard and 1 tsp. honey. Spread the mixture onto 3 whole wheat bread slices. Top each with lettuce, tomato and 1 more slice of bread. Serves 3.