

Why You Should Eat More Fruits and Vegetables

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The increased consumption of fruits and vegetables has been consistently shown to reduce the incidence of many types of chronic diseases like cancer, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. These superfoods are extremely high in nutrients like B and C vitamins, carotenoids, phytochemicals like lycopene, and anthocyanidins. These chemicals have been known to reduce the risk of vascular disease associated with the development of heart attack and stroke by lowering levels of dangerous homocysteine which can badly damage the inner linings of your arteries leading to plaque accumulation. These chemicals found in brightly colored vegetables and fruits can also reduce the damage to blood vessels by reducing cholesterol, blood pressure, and keeping blood from clotting.

Lower Cholesterol

The chemicals in these foods, known as polyphenols, can also reduce the damage on the inside of our arteries by preventing the oxidation of LDL cholesterol and the adherence of other molecules which can damage the sensitive inner linings. This propensity to keep the inside of our arteries clean is known as improved endothelial function. The polyphenols found in grapes, berries, dark green vegetables, and pomegranates can help reduce the risk of heart disease by improving endothelial function.

A new report recently released from a large research study has indicated that the increased intake of fruits and vegetables can reduce the risk of developing atherosclerosis of the coronary arteries. These arteries supply the heart muscle with its supply of oxygen and nutrients. Blockages occurring in the coronary arteries are the leading cause of heart attack.

Lifestyle Factors Play a Huge Role

“We know that lifestyle behaviors are really the foundation of cardiovascular-disease prevention, including diet,” said leading author of the report, Dr. Michael Miedema of the Minneapolis Heart Institute. “There are several studies showing that a diet high in fruits and vegetables in middle-aged adults is associated with less coronary heart disease. As your fruit and vegetable intake goes up, your relative risk for developing coronary heart disease goes down. It’s been seen in several other studies, but it’s been most consistent in women.”

The report findings were based upon the results of a study of 2,648 younger adults aged 18-30. The purpose of this research was to ascertain if there was a link between the development of heart disease and the intake of fruits and vegetables in a younger adult population. The evidence of heart disease was determined with the use of MRI imaging of the coronary arteries to determine the coronary calcium score. The higher the score, the greater amounts of calcium are found inside the walls of the coronary arteries. The coronary calcium score is considered a very accurate way to predict future coronary events like a heart attack.

After approximately 20 years of follow-up, those who ate the highest amounts of fruits and vegetables had a lower risk of developing heart disease. This was especially the case in the 1,610 females in the study who experienced a significant reduction in heart disease risk associated with a high intake of vegetables and fruits. Those women who ate the greatest amounts of these foods experienced a 40% reduced risk of developing coronary calcium plaques compared to those who ate the least amounts of these foods.

This is just another report which indicates that the consumption of more fruits and vegetables can lower the risk of developing heart disease.

In my opinion, the most important feature of this report is that it dealt with younger subjects and is important from a preventative perspective.

Source: O’Riordan, M., “Eating More Fruits and Vegetables Lowers CAC Burden in Women: CARDIA,” Medscape web site; <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/822665>, last accessed March 31, 2014.