HEART HEALTH TIP – LOWER CHOLESTEROL WITH SOLUBLE FIBER

February is Heart Month, and according to the Frederick County Health Department, Community Health Assessment, just released last month, cardiovascular disease fluctuates between the first and second leading cause of death in Frederick County. Fortunately there are actions people can take to lower their risk.

One proven strategy for lowering blood cholesterol levels is to eat soluble fiber, found naturally in oat products, barley, dried beans and legumes, citrus fruits and specific fruits and vegetables. How much soluble fiber? The recommendation is 7 to 12 grams daily according to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Evidence for Dietary Prevention and Treatment of Cardiovascular Disease.

The vegetable with the highest amount of soluble fiber is lima beans. Yes… lima beans. One half cup cooked lima beans provides 3.5 grams. Many of today’s consumers aren’t familiar with lima beans or they simply do not like them. Previous generations ate lima beans combined with corn to make succotash, a vegetarian replacement for meat. For parents trying to convince their kids to try lima beans check out the beautifully illustrated children’s book, A Bad Case of Stripes by David Shannon.

Other vegetable sources of soluble fiber are Brussels sprouts and kidney beans with 3 grams in a 1/2 cup cooked serving. Black beans and navy beans have two grams; and broccoli, carrots, chick peas, and black eyed peas have 1 gram in a 1/2 cup cooked serving.

The best fruit sources are oranges, grapefruit, and pears, supplying two grams for a medium size. Prunes come in next with 1.5 grams in 1/4 cup, followed by apples, bananas, nectarines, peaches, plums; and blackberries (1/2 cup). This is yet another reason to eat those Fruits & Veggies.

Decades ago cereal commercials, like Quaker Oats and Cheerios, made consumers aware of the benefits of oats. One serving of long cooking oats provides two grams of soluble fiber regardless of the brand. Since not everyone is as enthusiastic about oatmeal as those actors in the commercials, there are cold cereal alternatives like Cheerios, Quaker Oat Squares, which has two grams of soluble fiber in a one cup serving. Too busy to eat…grab Oatmeal to Go, another new product from Quaker, or a granola bar which is made from oats.
Barley also has soluble fiber and is currently being studied by USDA to determine its cardio protective benefits? Quaker makes the traditional barley which takes 45 minutes to cook and a quick cooking variety that takes only 10 minutes. I prefer the taste of the long cooking and recommend cooking and freezing it so you have it readily available to add to soups, stews, chili, and casseroles. A mere 1/4 cup serving has two grams of soluble fiber.

Enjoy these recipes to boost your intake of soluble fiber and protect your heart. Both can be made ahead and are attractive for serving to guests.

**MULTI-BEAN SALAD**

- 1/4 pound fresh green beans cut into 2-inch lengths
- 1 cup canned red kidney beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 cup canned chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 10 ounce package frozen lima beans, thawed
- 1 medium yellow bell pepper, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 medium red bell pepper, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 1/2 cups chopped scallions (about 8 medium)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 cup red wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon sugar

Blanch green beans in simmering water for 1 minute or until crisp tender. Rinse in cold water, drain, and set aside. Pour canned beans into a colander to drain. Cook the lima beans according to package directions and drain well. Slice peppers and scallions. In a large bowl combine drained beans, peppers, and scallions. In a small bowl blend the minced garlic, olive oil, vinegar, lemon juice, mustard, black pepper, and sugar. Pour dressing over the salad and toss well. Cover and refrigerate for 3 hours or longer, tossing occasionally to coat the vegetables evenly with the dressing.

**AMBROSIA**

- 4 large navel oranges
- 2 medium grapefruit
- 2 cups sweetened shredded coconut
- Maraschino cherries, optional

Peel and section the oranges and grapefruit, removing and discarding the white membrane. Place a layer of citrus sections in a decorative bowl or trifle dish. Sprinkle with coconut. Repeat, alternating citrus with coconut until all the ingredients have been used. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate to allow the flavors to blend. To serve, garnish with maraschino cherries.
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