Vegetable Stir Fry and Fruit Salad: The Super Diet for Health

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The importance of nutrition in public health in the prevention of acute and chronic disease can hardly be overestimated. The most recent Global Burden of Diseases Study suggests that 40% to 50% of the modifiable risk factors for morbidity and mortality in the Asia Pacific region are food and nutrition related.¹ To meet all requirements for essential nutrients and in preventing chronic disease, one of the most important food groups is fruit and vegetables.² In the more recent Global Burden of Disease Study, insufficient consumption of fruit and vegetables was included in the top 10 risk factors for chronic disease.³ The World Cancer Research Fund concluded that vegetables and fruit were important in the prevention of a number of different types of cancer.⁴ In the development of dietary guidelines that address chronic disease, eating adequate amounts of fruit and vegetables is always an important recommendation.

Numerous individual studies in our region have reported associations between fruit and vegetables consumption and a number of cancer types.⁵⁶ In preparation for developing the Australia Dietary Guidelines, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken.⁷ Sufficient evidence was found to make statements for fruit and vegetables separately or fruit and vegetables together in the prevention of cardiovascular disease, stroke, weight loss and obesity, type 2 diabetes, and a range of cancers including gastric, breast, lung, colorectal, esophageal, oral and nasopharyngeal, ovarian, endometrial, and bladder cancer. Similar conclusions were reached in reviews for the US, Japanese, and World Health Organization guidelines.⁸⁹ Fruit and vegetables contain a wide range of vitamins, phytochemicals, fiber, and some minerals that assist in meeting the population nutrient requirements. Their high nutrient density and lower energy and fat content make them desirable foods in an age where overweight and obesity are common.

Consumption of fruit and vegetables is now emphasized in every set of dietary recommendations, providing that the original nutrition value of the foods is not diluted by adding sugar, fat, or salt or overprocessing. The volume of food (nutrient density) of a vegetarian diet can be high and may not provide sufficient energy for small children.⁹ Cooking, but not overcooking, can improve the value of some vegetable foods by sanitizing and increasing bioavailability.

There have been varying estimates of the optimal quantity of fruit and vegetables that should be consumed. Now, Aune and colleagues have undertaken a systematic review and dose-response meta-analysis of fruit and vegetable consumption and mortality.¹⁰ They analyzed 95 prospective studies and confirmed a preventive association between fruit and vegetables and chronic disease. The risk of cardiovascular disease and all-cause mortality was reduced with intakes of up to 800 g/day of fruit and vegetables combined with a dose effect noted. For total cancer, no further

References