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EDITOR'S NOTE:

For more information on the TOPS chapters in your area, please visit www.tops.org. If you would like to speak with a local representative from TOPS, please contact us.

This Summer, Don't Take a Vacation From Healthy Living

MILWAUKEE, WI – Enjoy the relaxation of summer vacation, but avoid letting good health habits take a holiday - follow these suggestions from TOPS Club, Inc. (Take Off Pounds Sensibly):

During the summer, it's easy for families to eat poorly at festivals, ballgames, and tourist sites. Luckily, summer offers a bumper crop of opportunities to increase fruit and vegetable intake. For the freshest food possible, plant a garden at home. It's economical, nutritious, and promotes a closer tie to the environment.

Garden produce offers a cornucopia of health benefits. Here are some common fruits and vegetables and the ways they boost health:

- Tomatoes – The “fruit of summer” offers lycopene, a powerful protection against certain kinds of cancer. Tomatoes also contain potassium and vitamin C.
- Red pepper – Sweet, rather than spicy, red peppers provide vitamin A for bones, skin and teeth, and also provide as much vitamin C as an orange. Vitamin C helps promote a healthy immune system.

- Watermelon – Another source of lycopene, watermelon also reduces the risk for certain cancers, especially prostate. It also can decrease the chance of developing macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness in people over age 60.
- Strawberries – This sweet fruit is rich in vitamin C and folate, which helps promote a healthy heart. Folic acid also has been known to decrease the chance for some birth defects.

Farmers Markets

For those who would rather not seed and weed at home, farmers markets offer bushels of thrifty “slow food” produced locally. Here are practical ways to maximize a trip to a farmers market:

- Take menu cues from what’s in season, making gazpacho from cucumbers and tomatoes, and adding corn kernels from fresh ears of sweet corn to salsa. Make a tossed salad by combining a little of everything you bring home from the market.
- Try a new fruit or vegetable. Stroll through the rows of vendors and buy food of five different colors, as a way to get a variety of nutrients.
- Ask the vendor his or her favorite way to prepare a particular type of produce. Many have recipes to share. Also ask for tips on storing and preparing locally grown produce.
- Check if there are any special events offered at the farmers market. Many have cooking demonstrations, tastings, and fun activities for the kids.

For a summery, light burst of flavor, try the following salad recipe:

CANNELLINI BEAN SALAD

1 large sweet red pepper
 One 15-oz. can white kidney or cannellini beans, rinsed and drained
 1 medium red onion, sliced and separated into rings
 One-fourth cup minced fresh basil
 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
 2 tablespoons olive oil
 One-fourth teaspoon black pepper

Cut pepper in half and remove seeds. Place pepper halves cut-side down on a rack in broiler pan. Broil 4 inches from heat until skins blister, about 8 minutes. Immediately place pepper halves in a bowl, cover, and let stand for 15 to 20 minutes. Peel off and discard charred skin. Cut pepper halves into strips and place in large bowl. Add beans, onion, and basil. In a jar,

combine vinegar, oil, and black pepper. Cover with tight-fitting lid and shake well. Pour mixture over the beans. Toss to coat. Yields 8 servings of one-half cup each.

TOPS Club, Inc. (Take Off Pounds Sensibly), the original, nonprofit weight-loss education and support organization, was founded more than 60 years ago to champion weight-loss support and success. Founded and headquartered in Milwaukee, Wis., TOPS promotes successful weight management with a philosophy that combines healthy eating, regular exercise, wellness education, and support from others at weekly chapter meetings. TOPS has about 170,000 members in nearly 10,000 chapters throughout the United States and Canada, and several chapters in Europe.

Visitors are welcome to attend their first TOPS meeting free of charge. To find a local chapter, view www.tops.org or call (800) 932-8677 for more information.

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