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Ring in new year with healthy twist on Chinese fare

COQUITLAM NOW JANUARY 28, 2011

There's nothing wrong with losing a bit of the fat in Gung Hay Fat Choy celebrations.

The Year of the Rabbit begins on Feb. 3, 2011 -- a week that will be marked with feasts of celebration and other cultural activities throughout the Chinese community.

This year, Chinese new year falls within National Heart Month, so it's a great time for all families to add some heart-healthy Chinese dishes to their dinner tables to celebrate this important cultural festival while remembering to honour our hearts.

According to dietitian Gloria Tsang, founder of HealthCastle.com, there are many healthy ingredients in Chinese cooking -- even though it tends to get a bad rap.

"Many people think of fat-heavy dishes like lemon chicken or spring rolls when they think of Chinese food," Tsang says. "But there are many heart-healthy ingredients that have been part of Chinese cooking for centuries."

Here are Tsang's top five ingredients for making heart-healthy Chinese dishes at home:

CITRUS

Citrus fruits like oranges, pomelos and tangerines are good sources of flavonoids, antioxidants that contribute to heart health. Of course, they're also packed with vitamin C. Toss these traditional symbols of happiness and good fortune into stir fries or use the juice instead of salad dressing.

BROWN RICE

Rice and Chinese cooking go hand-in-hand, but whole-grain brown rice is much better for your heart than white rice. Whole grains like brown rice can reduce heart disease by lowering cholesterol and blood pressure. Use brown rice instead of white rice in any Chinese recipe.

TOFU

Soy, the source of tofu, has been shown to help lower cholesterol and triglycerides and prevent heart disease. To add more heart-healthy soy to your Chinese cooking, use tofu to replace meat. Try a stir-fried tofu (firm) and broccoli dish with black bean sauce.

BOK CHOY

Bok choy is packed with vitamins A and C, phytonutrients and folate, which add up to one heart-healthy vegetable. Plus, it's very filling, high in fibre and low in calories. Try stir-frying it in a non-stick pan or tossing it into your salad.

FISH

Omega-3 fatty acids from fish have been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease by lowering cholesterol. Cod and sea bass are more prevalent on the Chinese menu, but you can use any fish you prefer. Try steaming with ginger or topping with black bean sauce.

Chinese new year is a perfect time to enjoy Asian cooking at home. With these tips, it's easy to celebrate your heart at the same time by incorporating heart-healthy ingredients into your Chinese meals. More healthy eating tips from registered dietitians are available at [www.HealthCastle.com](#).

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