Living Healthy

Lafayette County

January 2016

Prepare and Eat More Meals at Home

Preparing and eating meals at home is an important step toward eating healthy. Too many of us eat out in restaurants and on the go more than we should. We know that when we eat out we usually eat larger portion sizes; more calories, fat, and sugar; fewer fruits and vegetables; fewer whole grains; and fewer low-fat dairy products.

Meals you prepare and eat at home don’t have to be fancy or gourmet, and they don’t have to take a lot of time. Preparing a simple meal at home takes about as much time as driving to a fast food restaurant or ordering a pizza.

You can have easy, quick, and healthy meals at home. Just keep it simple with these four steps: PLAN, SHOP, FIX, and EAT.

Plan

• The first and most important step is planning. Start by keeping a list of the things your family likes to eat. This list can help you as you plan for each week. If you try a new recipe that everyone likes, don’t forget to add it to the list.
• If you plan meals, you will actually save time and money in the long run. By planning ahead, you will have the things on hand you need to fix quick, easy, healthy meals for you and your family – and it won't take any more time than going to the drive-thru.
• Set aside 30 minutes to plan for the next week.
• Make a list of the main dish and the side dishes that you will serve for each day of the week. Select recipes that have few ingredients and that use quick cooking techniques.
• Post the menu on the refrigerator.
• Get input from your family members. Use your list of everyone’s favorite foods, including main dishes, salads, vegetables, fruits, and desserts.
• Look in cookbooks, newspapers, Web sites, or magazines for quick main dish and side dish ideas. Add them to the list. File recipes in a file, box, or loose-leaf notebook.
Shop
• Shop regularly, whether once a week or once a month. This saves time, gas, and money.
• In-season fruits and vegetables are less expensive and taste better.
• Visit local farmer’s markets or farm stands for lower prices and better quality.
• Stick to the list. You are less likely to overspend and less likely to forget ingredients you may need for your week’s menus.
• Don’t shop hungry. Eat a snack, or go shopping after eating a meal.
• Get the kids involved by letting them choose a new fruit or vegetable that they’d like to try or an old favorite. Kids who get to help pick out foods and help fix them are more likely to try them.

Fix
• Stick to your plan.
• Wash and prepare fruits and vegetables in advance.
• Make extra of a main dish for another meal.
• Add a favorite canned or frozen fruit or vegetable to any main meal.
• Check your meal plan each evening, and take out frozen meats the night before. Place them in a dish in the refrigerator to thaw safely for the next day’s dinner.
• Fixing meals can be fun for the whole family. Children are more likely to try new foods if they help get them to the table. Safety comes first. Encourage good hand-washing.

Eat
• Eat together. All families are busy. Make eating together a family priority. Mealtime is a great opportunity for parents and kids to be together. Adults are important role models for kids and can influence foods they taste and learn to eat. Remember that kids often take more time to eat than adults do. Take your time through dinner, and enjoy the extra few minutes sitting at the table before cleaning up.
• Turn off the television, radio, cell phone, and beeper so everyone can focus on the conversation without distraction. Let the answering machine pick up calls, or turn off the phone ringer to avoid dinner interruptions.
• Share events of the day: Ask each person at the table to talk about a fun activity or something good that happened that day. It is a wonderful time to catch up on special school events or achievements of the kids in your family. You can also plan upcoming family activities (maybe going for a walk after dinner).
• It is easier to make healthy choices when meals are prepared at home and families sit at the table together to share that meal. It is a good time to talk about and model healthy eating, portion sizes, and trying new foods.

Choosing healthy beverages is a great first step to an overall healthy diet. Americans are drinking more soft drinks than ever. Per capita soft-drink consumption has increased almost 500 percent over the past 50 years. There is enough regular soda produced to supply every American with more than 14 ounces of soda every day. One reason for the steady rise in soft drink consumption is larger portion sizes; fountain drinks can range in size from 22 to 64 ounces. Children start drinking soda at a remarkably young age, and consumption increases through young adulthood.

People who drink soft drinks take in more calories than those who do not. Drinking sugar-sweetened beverages has been associated with weight gain, overweight, obesity, and type 2 diabetes. A 12-ounce can of soda has 150 calories and 10 teaspoons of sugar in the form of high fructose corn syrup. If these calories are added to the typical diet without cutting back on something else, one soda a day could lead to a weight gain of 15 pounds in one year.

Sports drinks, another popular soft drink, are for athletes who participate in high-intensity, aerobic exercise for at least 90 minutes. Most kids are not this active. The added sugar and sodium in sports drinks are unnecessary for children and youth. Sports drinks offer little advantage over water for kids.

Try these tips to help you and your family re-think your drink:

- Help children learn to enjoy water as the thirst quencher of choice.
- Make soft drinks a “sometimes” beverage to be enjoyed in moderate amounts. Remember that soft drinks include fruitades, fruit drinks, lemonade, energy drinks, sweet tea, and sports drinks.
- Keep a pitcher of water in the refrigerator for easy access.
- Add lemon, lime, other fruit, or a splash of juice to water.

Lafayette County Extension has a Factsheet (FCS467) with more information on changes you can make when it comes to planning and preparing drinks for you and your family. Contact our office at (870) 921-4744 or e-mail ttreadway@uaex.edu and ask for your free copy of “Rethink Your Drink!”.
Salt Awareness Week is Jan 31 - Feb 6

Everyone needs some salt to function. Also known as sodium chloride, salt helps maintain the body's balance of fluids. Salt also functions in many foods as a preservative by helping to prevent spoilage and keeping certain foods safe to eat. But nearly all Americans consume more salt than they need, according to the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These guidelines are published every five years by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The natural salt in food accounts for about 10 percent of total intake, on average, according to the guidelines. The salt we add at the table or while cooking adds another 5 to 10 percent. About 75 percent of our total salt intake comes from salt added to processed foods by manufacturers and salt that cooks add to foods at restaurants and other food service establishments.

Q. What are the health effects of too much salt?
A. In many people, salt contributes to high blood pressure. High blood pressure makes the heart work harder and can lead to heart disease, stroke, heart failure, and kidney disease.

Q. What steps can I take to lower my salt intake?
A. • Eat more fresh fruits and vegetables.
   • Consume foods that are rich in potassium. Potassium can help blunt the effects of sodium on blood pressure. The recommended intake of potassium for adolescents and adults is 4,700 mg/day. Potassium-rich foods include leafy, green vegetables and fruits from vines.
   • Flavor food with pepper and other herbs and spices instead of salt.
   • Choose unsalted snacks.
   • Read food labels and choose foods low in sodium.

Q. Are salt substitutes safe?
A. Many salt substitutes contain potassium chloride and can be used by individuals to replace salt in their diet. There are no known undesirable effects in healthy people who consume a lot of potassium; however, potassium could be harmful to people with certain medical conditions, such as diabetes, kidney disease, and heart disease. Check with your doctor before using salt substitutes.

If you would like more nutrition or health information, contact me at (870) 921-4744, ttreadway@uaex.edu or by visiting our office in the Agri-Plex Building in Lewisville.

Sincerely

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