

March is National Nutrition Month



In today's fast-paced society, living a healthy lifestyle can be a challenge. Cooking nutritious meals and making time to exercise can be difficult to fit into an already hectic day. As a result, many people turn to fast-food and fad diets in an attempt to find a "quick fix." However, it's important to focus on the facts of what it takes to be healthy.

Living a healthy lifestyle isn't just about being at a healthy weight. It's also about having the energy to do the activities you want to do, like playing with your children or breathing more easily when you exercise. Why not take advantage of National Nutrition Month[®] by marking it as a starting point to a healthier you?

The theme for National Nutrition Month[®] 2009 is *Eat Right*.

Eat Your Way to Health

A big part of being healthy includes eating nutritious foods. It can reduce your risk of chronic diseases and help you maintain a healthy weight. It also gives your body the nutrients it needs to perform at its best by helping you to fight off illness and to be focused and energetic.

Healthy eating includes more than just eating the right foods. It also means eating the right amounts of those foods. The recommendations for what each person should eat are different and are based on age, sex, height, weight, and activity level. To find general guidelines on what you should be eating, go to www.mypyramid.gov.

Following are some tips on how to improve your nutrition.

1. **Take a look at your eating habits.** Do you tend to eat based on how you're feeling emotionally? Do you have a hard time controlling urges to eat large amounts of food? Do you frequently snack on unhealthy foods? If you have eating habits such as these, you may want to look at how they could be affecting your overall health.
2. **Be aware of your portion sizes.** The United States is known for its "super-sized" meals. In fact, in recent years portion sizes have increased, both in the home and at restaurants.¹ To avoid overeating, you may want to make it a habit to leave some food on your plate, or try tricks such as using smaller plates, bowls, or utensils.
3. **Make healthy food choices.** Whether having a meal or a snack, choosing healthy food items can help you to improve your health. It's also important to limit how much you eat of foods that are high in sugar, salt, and fat. Looking at food labels can be very useful in helping you figure out just how healthy (or unhealthy) your food selections are.
4. **Don't forget about your beverages.** Many of your daily calories can come from drinking beverages, such as soda. Keep in mind that what you drink is just as important as what you eat.
5. **Plan ahead.** Packing a healthy lunch and snacks can help you to eat healthfully when you're away from home.

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Get moving!

To live a healthier lifestyle, you'll also need to include regular physical activity in your daily routine. This doesn't mean you have to start running marathons or going to the gym every day. But even adding small amounts of activity into your daily schedule can result in changes.

Here are some tips to help you get started.

1. **Know why physical activity is important.** Physical activity burns fat and helps build muscle. It also reduces the risk of certain diseases, helps increase energy, strength, endurance, and flexibility. Combined with good nutrition, physical activity completes the puzzle of what is necessary for good health.
2. **Get regular activity.** Make it a goal to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day. But take time to work up to that goal if you aren't already active. And you don't have to do all of your activity at once for it to be beneficial to you. If you can't walk for 30 minutes at one time, three 10-minute walks are almost as good.
3. **Be realistic.** Don't think that physical activity has to always include strenuous activity. Instead, think of it as just *moving your body*. There are hundreds of ways to move your body that don't require extra time or equipment. Check out "Everyday Ways to Get Moving" at the end of this article for some examples to get your ideas flowing.
4. **Make fitness a family activity.** Join a fitness center or sports club, and take the whole family. Take a walk to the park or ride your bikes around the neighborhood. Or plan a vacation around hiking, canoeing, camping, skiing, or another physical activity.
5. **Fit activity into your workday routine.** How about taking a walk during your lunch break? Or taking the stairs instead of the elevator?

*Before beginning an exercise program, it's important to talk to your doctor.

Making the Change

An important part of living a healthy lifestyle is staying motivated. One way to do this is to make sure to reward yourself for your successes, no matter how small they may seem to you. Each improvement you make is one step closer to your goal.

Changing the way you think may also be necessary to maintain a healthy lifestyle. For example, instead of "living to eat," try concentrating on "eating to live." And instead of viewing physical activity as a painful obligation, think of it as a way to relieve stress. Changing your relationship with food and activity can make your journey much easier.

Living a healthy lifestyle doesn't mean you have to give up all the things you enjoy. Instead, it's about *moderation*. Small changes can make a big difference. But the more you try, the easier it'll be, and you'll soon find that it's become a normal part of your life.

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For more information, visit the American Dietetic Association at www.eatright.org

National Nutrition Month[®] is a nutrition education and information campaign created by the American Dietetic Association. The campaign is designed to focus attention on the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits.

References:

¹Nielsen, S.J., Popkin, B.M. (2003). Patterns and Trends in Food Portion Sizes, 1977-1998. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 2003;289:450-453. Retrieved March 29, 2007 from the World Wide Web: <http://jama.highwire.org/cgi/content/abstract/289/4/450>

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Everyday Ways to Get Moving

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Park farther away from the office, the grocery store, etc.
- Work in the garden or rake the leaves.
- Cut the grass with a push mower instead of a riding mower.
- Go for a short walk before breakfast, after dinner, or both.
- Walk or bike to do errands that are not too far away.
- Pedal a stationary bike or do a chore or project while watching your favorite show.
- Walk the dog.
- Walk down the hall to talk to someone at work instead of calling or e-mailing.
- Walk around the airport while waiting for a plane.
- Walk a little extra around the mall or store, window shop, or people-watch.
- Dance to your favorite music - even if you are alone.
- Go to a museum or botanical garden instead of a movie or concert.
- Volunteer in an active capacity; for example, carrying food or firewood to the needy, cleaning up a park, teaching gymnastics, or coaching little league.
- Take a walk at lunch; have a meeting with a business partner while taking a walk.
- When golfing, walk instead of using a cart.
- Carry your own groceries.
- Do housework at a brisk pace.
- Wash the car yourself instead of going to a car wash.
- Play actively with your kids, grandchildren, or pets. Join in on their sports practice - kick a soccer ball with them, play catch with a baseball or football, etc.
- Plan family outings around physical activities such as canoeing, swimming, hiking, or skiing. Take along your bikes or roller blades. Break up long drives by hiking the nature trails and scenic walks along many routes.
- Check out the nature hikes and parks in your own town.
- Get busy on household projects you've been putting off such as sweeping the sidewalk, cleaning the windows, or cleaning out the garage or basement.
- Use a cordless phone or headset so you can stand, walk, or engage in another physical activity while talking on the phone.

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