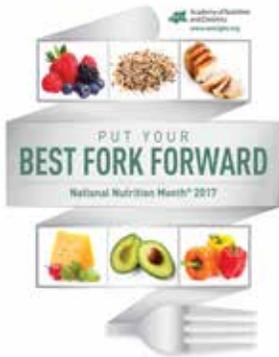


Put Your Best Fork Forward



March is National Nutrition Month and this year's theme is "Put Your Best Fork Forward," a reminder that each person holds the tools to make healthy choices in life. According to registered

dietitian nutritionist and Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics spokesperson, Angel Planells, "Every year, many people make resolutions and are committed to new beginnings; those feelings wither away by late January or early February. The month of March is the best time to give the public extra doses of healthy living guidance."

STARTING EARLY

Encouraging exercise and nutritious eating for children can influence their long-term health. Overweight children are at higher risk for developing heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and Type 2 diabetes. Registered dietitian Mandy Enright advises parents to promote daily intake of fruits and vegetables to create a healthy environment for children. In addition, parents should be good role models for healthy living says Planells. "Evidence shows that making dietary and lifestyle changes can prevent diseases before they occur," he adds. During National Nutrition Month and beyond, make small, healthier food choices – one forkful at a time.

KIDS IN THE KITCHEN

Getting children involved in meal planning and cooking is a great way to encourage healthy eating. Sarah Krieger, MPH, RDN, LDN, emphasizes that cooking tasks for kids should be appropriate for their age and ability. Have younger kids use plastic knives to cut soft foods, like mushrooms and cheeses. And Aileen Birkitt, RD, owner of Nutrition 4 You, LLC, says kid-friendly cookbooks provide ideas for different ages. Enright recommends kids get involved in the grocery shopping, too. Letting each child pick a fruit and vegetable they want to cook that week will make them more likely to eat it. Another way to create interest in nutritious eating is to grow a garden together as a family.

HEALTHY HOUSEHOLDS

There are many options for building a healthy household for you and your family. According to Enright, "Every food fits in a nutritious diet when eaten in moderation. A family could have a side veggie along with a salad." Also, opt for higher fiber grains like brown rice and whole wheat bread. Planells adds, "It is important to focus on eating at home most of the time. It will save in your wallet and on your waistline." Birkitt suggests taking time on the weekend to plan meals for the week. Then create your grocery list and go shopping as a family. Busy families should stock their house with lots of washed and cut up fruits and vegetables as well as healthy snacks such as whole grain crackers, cheese sticks, hummus, peanut butter and homemade trail mix.



GET ACTIVE

Exercise and activity are important at every age. Parents should encourage their children to be physically active by picking sports and activities they enjoy. When you are having fun, you're more likely to stick with it. Anything that gets you moving counts including skate boarding, dancing and bicycling. Aim for 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity activity or a half-hour/day, five days/week.

National Nutrition Month is an important time for families to make it a goal to create a healthy household, be more physically active and get children involved in shopping, cooking and preparing meals with their parents. That way, you'll be sure to "Put Your Best Fork Forward."



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