



Nutrition: Simple Steps to a Healthier You!

By Marjorie Maxwell, RD, Esse Health

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According to the American Dietetic Association, March is National Nutrition Month and the theme this year is “Eat Right From the Ground Up”. The campaign focuses attention on the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits.

Remember the old joke “If it tastes good, don’t eat it?” Old nutrition messages implied boring and tasteless meals. Well those days are long behind us. We have so many more options today and healthy food no longer has to be boring! Food is versatile and has so many purposes in our lives. It is fuel for athletes, calcium for bone strength, calories for growth, and fiber for cancer prevention. It is time to return to family meals with time to savor our food and connect with family. It is time to start thinking optimal rather than deprivation.

Like many of our modern habits, eating has room for improvement in quality and quantity. The average American eats only 15 grams of the recommended daily 30 grams of fiber and our potassium intakes are in the basement. Learning to plan meals, shop healthier and budget time for family meals will optimize our potentials.

A good way to start eating healthier is to create a plan. Consult a Registered Dietitian that can help set goals for you and your family. They can provide you with the information and resources you need to find a plan that works for you.

If you are overwhelmed by the myriad of diet advice in the media, keep a food journal. In your journal write down everything you eat and drink for at least one week. When you take a look back you might be surprised to see that you are consuming over 400 calories in soda a day.

You can also use evidence based nutrition evaluations such as www.mypyramidtracker.gov. Provided by the USDA, this tool allows you to see how your choices stack up to your age and gender based targets. You can assess both your food intake and physical activity.

Improving your eating habits is not as simple as reading a pamphlet or eating whole wheat bread. Evidence shows that participation in a support group dramatically increases the chances for your success. Find a support group in your area and bring your family. They can be fun and educational at the same time!

Supplements can help but it appears you cannot fool Mother Nature. Calcium in dairy products is better absorbed than calcium in supplements. Blood pressure lowering potassium in foods is not the same as potassium in supplements. It is human nature to want a simple solution to a complex problem, but when it comes to nutrition there are no short cuts.

Nutrition also plays a vital role in disease management. For example, the overall quality of the diet was more effective in lowering blood pressure than one single nutrient. Today most people diagnosed with diabetes are first treated with diet and exercise.

If you describe your current diet by listing the foods you do not eat, push the reset button. Nutrition is what you do eat. Having a plan and choosing to eat right can dramatically increase your quality of life. Frankly, a month does not begin to cover it. We need at least a nutrition decade.

Resources:

- [Dole SuperKids](#)
- [American Dietetic Association](#)

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