

Fall In To Healthy Living

Fall is officially here and for many folks, this is the season when they “fall” back in to old habits that they worked so hard to break during the fair weather of spring and the warm sunshine of summer. Some of the more common areas of relapse are in the areas of making healthy food choices and maintaining physical activity. It seems that spring and summer are the seasons that lend themselves to activity and healthy eating while fall and winter are the seasons when we tend to slow down, if not halt, that forward momentum.

Before you fully turn that corner into relapse, I have a few simple ideas to help you fall in to healthy living instead of falling back into bad habits. My first suggestion is to make sure each meal you have is focused on healthy eating. You can do this in several ways. Make at least half of your plate at each meal full of fruits and vegetables. Fresh fruits and vegetables add color and crunch to the meal, but you can use frozen and canned products as good alternatives (watch sugar and salt content, though.) Try adding variety to your protein choices by changing up your cooking method. Grilling is certainly a great option in the cooler evenings the fall season offers us, but you can bring it back inside and broil or roast your meats. All three of these methods keep you from adding extra fat to the food you are preparing. Make sure at least half of the breads, pasta and cereal products you are consuming are whole-grain. Reduce the amount of food you eat that is high in fat, sugar, and salt. If you aren't already drinking skim or 1% milk, consider making the change so that you are still getting the same nutritive value without the higher calories of whole milk.

Another recommendation is to monitor the portion size and the calorie content of what you consume. Many restaurants offer their nutritional information online or identify the lower calorie meal choices on their menu for their customers. I am a strong advocate for eating at home as much as possible. Not only is it less expensive to prepare your own food, you have more control over the food preparation methods and ingredients you use in your meal. You have the ability to limit the portion size and calorie content of the foods you prepare for yourself and your family.

A third action you could take would be to maintain, if not increase, your daily physical activity level by finding activities you like to do. I have to admit that I am a fair-weather walker, but there are other activities I like that keep me moving. With 3 young kids at home, going for a bicycle ride always moves me to “#1 Mom” status! Although I could ask my kids to trek up and down the stairs on laundry days, often times I will choose to do this task instead, just to make sure I am getting my exercise in for the day. If you have an office job where you tend to sit for the majority of the day, make sure you get up from your desk at least once an hour to get your body moving. As suggestions, walk down to the water fountain or out to the parking lot and back.

Finally, drinking plenty of water is foundational to maintaining a healthy balance. Even in the fall and winter months when the cooler weather reduces our rate of perspiration, our body needs water to maintain its functions. Our body uses water for the following functions: regulate body temperature; lubricate and cushion our joints; protect our body – specifically the spinal cord and other sensitive tissue; and keep our body regular by ridding it of waste. Keep your water balance at an adequate level by carrying a

water bottle with you at work or home. Keep the water cool to make it more appealing. You can also add a slice of lemon or lime to jazz up the flavor a bit. Choose water over sugar-sweetened beverages. As added benefits, water has no calories and usually costs nothing when you are dining out. (Sources: CDC, USDA)

If you find yourself wanting to avoid the loss of momentum during the fall season, I am offering a couple of Healthy Living programs on October 3 that will give you some ideas of what you can do to start or maintain a healthy balance in your daily living. The first program is targeted for adults who are 50 and older that are interested in increasing their physical activity. The one hour program begins at 4:00 p.m. at the Geary County Senior Center. The program will explain the impact an active lifestyle has on health and well-being and explore types of activities that can keep you active. Another program later the same day at 6:00 p.m. is for adults of any age. This hour-long program will help participants consider their food choices and create a personal plan to get themselves motivated to eat healthy and be physically active. Both programs are free, but require that you call the Geary County office to register so that we can make sure we have enough resources for everyone. Contact Donna at the Geary County Extension office at 238-4161 to reserve your space.