

Daily Union Article
Saturday, March 24, 2018
Title: Steps to a Healthier Family

It likely comes as no surprise that I love to cook. I wouldn't say that I am a culinary artist. Rather, I am a mom and wife who likes to satisfy the appetites of the 3 boys and husband in her home. If there's a crew to cook for, I like that, too.

At the heart of the joy I get from cooking is the way in which it contributes to building family relationships. My dad had me in the kitchen with him at a young age and my skills in food preparation and appreciation of the time spent with him only grew as I got older. At the age of 15, I was already the cook in one of the local cafés where I grew up. The café offered a 3-meal, wide variety, full menu. It was a great learning environment for how to prepare multiple menu items simultaneously so that everything was finished at the same time, plated, and served hot.

Perhaps that's why I value and enjoy my family meal preparation time with my own kids. When I get to share kitchen time with any one of my boys (I don't have a big kitchen so they can't all be in there with me at once!), we make food while having fun.

Meal time as a family helps anchor family members and build valuable memories. When you are conscientious about what you prepare, you also have the capability to make smart choices from every food group. The daily food choices you and your family make can have a positive impact on the health of your family today, tomorrow, and in the future. Because our bodies need a variety of nutrients each day, eating a variety of healthy foods will help us achieve better health.

How do we know what are smart food choices for our families? The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2015-2020 can serve as a compass for us in knowing what direction we should take our food choices. These guidelines include the following five general recommendations:

Follow a healthy eating pattern across the lifespan. All food and beverage choices matter. Choose a healthy eating pattern at an appropriate calorie level to help achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, support nutrient adequacy, and reduce the risk of chronic disease.

A healthy eating pattern includes:

- A variety of vegetables from all of the subgroups—dark green, red and orange, legumes (beans and peas), starchy, and other
- Fruits, especially whole fruits
- Grains, at least half of which are whole grains
- Fat-free or low-fat dairy, including milk, yogurt, cheese, and/or fortified soy beverages
- A variety of protein foods, including seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes (beans and peas), and nuts, seeds, and soy products
- Oils

A healthy eating pattern limits:

- Saturated fats and *trans* fats, added sugars, and sodium

Focus on variety, nutrient density, and amount. To meet nutrient needs within calorie limits, choose a variety of nutrient-dense foods across and within all food groups in recommended amounts. Nutrient dense foods and beverages are characterized by having vitamins, minerals, and other substances that contribute to adequate nutrient intakes or may have positive health effects. They have little or no solid fats and added sugars, refined starches, and sodium. Ideally, these foods and beverages are also in forms that retain naturally occurring components, such as dietary fiber.

Limit calories from added sugars and saturated fats and reduce sodium intake. Consume an eating pattern low in added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium. Cut back on foods and beverages higher in these components to amounts that fit within healthy eating patterns.

Shift to healthier food and beverage choices. Choose nutrient-dense foods and beverages across and within all food groups in place of less healthy choices. Consider cultural and personal preference to make these shifts easier to accomplish and maintain.

Support healthy eating patterns for all. Everyone has a role in helping to create and support healthy eating patterns in multiple settings nationwide, from home to school to work to communities.

Your food choices are only part of the equation for good health. You must also consider your level of physical activity. The balance between the food you take in to your body and the energy you use through physical activity is key in maintaining your health and well-being. This balance will not only help you control your body weight, it also helps reduce your risk of heart disease, osteoporosis, diabetes, and other chronic conditions. All ages can adopt healthy lifestyle behaviors that can help them maintain a healthy body.

- Set a good example by being physically active individually and together as a family. Go for a walk, ride your bikes, or play at the park.
- Establish a routine by setting aside time each day as activity time.
 - Adults need at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week to reduce their risk of disease. About 60 to 90 minutes of moderate physical activity is recommended to prevent weight gain or maintain weight loss.
 - Children and teenagers need 60 minutes of activity every day on most days of the week.

Family mealtime makes positive memories and it can also make a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of all members. By making shared meals a priority in your family you are investing in your family on a much larger scale.

For more information about family meal time, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!