

March is National Nutrition Month

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

For years Colorado has held the title of being the leanest state in the nation, and while that's still true, there's been a drastic rise in overweight and obesity across the state. In fact, obesity prevalence has more than doubled since 1995 and more than one of every five Coloradans is now considered obese.

The month of March is set aside as National Nutrition Month, and this year's theme is "Get Your Plate in Shape." The theme encourages consumers to ensure they are eating the recommended amounts of fruits, vegetables, grains, protein foods and dairy each day and goes along with the United States Department of Agriculture's MyPlate program.

Launched in June 2011, MyPlate replaced the food pyramid as the government's primary food group symbol as an easy-to-understand visual cue to help consumers adopt healthy eating habits.

Dividing the plate into four sections: fruits, vegetables, grains and proteins, as well as a glass representing dairy products, it shows consumers how they can incorporate the recommendations of the dietary guidelines into every meal.

Some of the key messages for ensuring people get the proper nutrition while staying healthy are to make half of the plate fruits and vegetables, make at least half of the grains whole grains and switch to fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk. The campaign also focuses on balancing calories through portion control.

According to Cynthia May, a registered dietitian with the Northeast Colorado Health Department, the benefit of eating fruits and vegetables is that they contain beta carotene, vitamin C, vitamin E and selenium. All of which are nutrients and antioxidants that protect the body's cells from damage. They also help keep the immune system healthy and may reduce risk of cancer and other diseases.

Whole grains and legumes are high in fiber and low in fat and may protect one from colon and rectal cancer. Dairy boosts calcium, which is important for bone strength, and new studies suggest that higher calcium intake is associated with lower body fat in children.

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Obesity is dangerous, and it is becoming more commonly linked to serious health problems such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes. Practicing proper nutrition is one way to get a handle on each of these health threats, as well as solving weight problems at the same time.

“The best approach to weight management and a healthier you is to stay physically active, control your portion sizes and choose a diet high in fiber and complex carbohydrates, moderate in lean sources of protein and low in healthy fats,” said May.

“The key is moderation, no food is forbidden, but watch the portion sizes. Super-sizing portions is super-sizing the American population.”

Realizing that making life changes, especially in eating habits, is not an easy thing to do, May suggested starting with the goal of eating at least two fruit servings, three vegetable servings and three servings of whole-grain breads and cereals every day.

“Watching food intake is a practice that needs to start in childhood,” said May. “Since children learn from their parents, the importance of setting a good example is very important for adults.”

For more information about nutrition, contact NCHD at 1-877-795-0646, or for information on the USDA’s MyPlate program, visit www.choosemyplate.gov .

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