

March – National Nutrition Month

There's no one food, drink, pill or machine that is key to achieving optimal health. Here are a few tips and recipes to celebrate National Nutrition Month, "Eat Right, Bite by Bite," by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

What is the best way to achieve optimal health?

Focusing on your daily routine is most important when it comes to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The best advice: regular physical activity *plus* an eating pattern that meets your nutrient needs within your calorie budget.

What types of food should I eat?

The focus should be on nutrient-rich foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and lean protein. This includes getting your daily allowance of produce – the more colorful the better.

March is the ripe time to add delicious produce to your plate. Many people read the headlines and worry if they are feeding their family properly, if they should buy conventional produce or if it is necessary to buy organic produce.

Studies have not shown that buying organic produce is more nutritious. However, they do reveal fruits and vegetables are linked to health benefits such as weight management and reduced chances of chronic disease. Studies also show most people do not get enough fiber, potassium, calcium, magnesium, and other minerals found in fruits and vegetables.

How often should I eat fruits and vegetables?

The bottom line – eat more.

Add produce to every meal and snack. Include more whole-foods such as fiber-rich fruits and vegetables.

- Eat fruit instead of fruit juice
- Add colorful vegetables instead of veggie chips
- Have baked potatoes instead of fries
- Choose not only fresh, but also frozen or canned options

Check out a few favorite recipes using fresh, canned, and frozen produce that will get you on the track!

Signature Oven-Roasted Vegetables with Herbs

Ingredients:

- 1 large red onion
- 1 lb. French green beans
- 1 lb. fingerling potatoes
- 1 lb. baby carrots

1 red bell pepper
1 yellow bell pepper
1-2 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
Fresh rosemary
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
Sea salt, to taste

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a large baking pan with parchment or a silicon baking mat.
2. Remove the stem end of the onion and slice off the brown part of the root end, leaving the root intact. Peel the onion. Stand each onion root end up on a cutting board and cut the onion in wedges through the root. Place the wedges in a large stainless-steel bowl.
3. Rinse, dry, and, cut fingerling potatoes in half. Place in same stainless-steel bowl.
4. Scrub baby carrots. Trim stems.
5. Cut red and yellow bell peppers into 1-inch pieces. Place in stainless-steel bowl.
6. Toss vegetables with olive oil until well mixed.
7. Place vegetables on the baking pan and sprinkle with rosemary sprigs, pepper, and sea salt.
8. Place in preheated oven for 20-25 minutes. Toss the vegetables once during cooking. Watch closely so they do not overcook.
9. Remove from oven and serve warm or room temperature.

Yield: 4-6 servings

Source: Cindy Kleckner, RDN, LD, FAND

Pronto Bean and Vegetable Soup

Ingredients:

1 lb. ground turkey (or lean ground beef)
1 large onion, diced
¼ cup water, if needed
1, 15 oz. can low-sodium whole kernel corn, not drained
2, 14½ oz. cans chopped tomatoes, not drained
1, 14½ oz. can hominy, not drained
1, 15 oz. can pinto beans with jalapeno, not drained
1 package dry Hidden Valley Ranch salad dressing
1 package reduced sodium dry taco seasoning mix
1, 32 oz. carton low-sodium chicken broth

Instructions:

1. Cook turkey or ground beef in skillet until browned. Add onions and cook until transparent.
2. Add all remaining ingredients and simmer 15-20 minutes. Ready to serve.
3. Garnish with fresh cilantro.

Yield: 12 servings

Source: Kathy Haggard, RDN, LD, FAND

Caribbean Fruit Smoothie

Ingredients:

1 cup frozen diced mango
1 cup frozen diced papaya
2 cups frozen diced pineapple
1½ cup fresh orange juice
½ cup low-fat or skim milk
½ tsp coconut extract, if desired
¾ cup plain nonfat Greek yogurt
½ cup ice

Instructions:

1. In a blender, combine all of the ingredients. Puree until desired consistency.

Yields: 6 servings

Source: Cindy Kleckner, RDN, LD

Boost your fitness plan with a Nutrition Consultation with Cindy Kleckner, RDN, LD, FAND registered dietitian nutritionist and culinary expert at the Apex Centre, City of McKinney's Aquatic and Fitness Facility. For personal training and nutrition consultations email fitness@mckinneytexas.org.