

**INSIDE
THIS ISSUE:**

**Nutrition
and You 1**

**How to
Stay
Motivated
and Keep
Exercising 2**

**The Health
Benefits of
Pet
Ownership 2**

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Nutrition and You

March is National Nutrition Month. Eating well can help reduce the risk of chronic diseases like cancer, diabetes, obesity, and hypertension. It also means eating a variety of healthy foods in the right amounts so your body gets the nutrients needed to maintain good health and work properly.

What exactly are the nutrients that come from food? They are different foods that provide different kinds of nutrients:

Proteins (lean meats, eggs, beans, nuts) help build muscle and a strong immune system.

Carbohydrates (starches, sugar and whole grains that also provide fiber) give you energy.

Fats provide essential fatty acids and extra energy.

Vitamins and minerals (commonly available in fruits, vegetables and whole grains) regulate body processes, enhance cell function and growth and help build a strong immune system.



Water gives cells shape and acts as a medium where body processes can occur.

Including a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins into each meal will help ensure that your body gets the right amount of the essential nutrients. Eating too many saturated fats and sugars can lead to excess weight gain and chronic disease. A healthy balance for your fat intake should include higher daily intakes of monounsaturated fats (olive, canola and peanut oils) along with omega 3 fatty acids, which one can get by consuming fish at least twice a week. Avoid trans-fatty acids found in many processed foods.

In general, processed foods tend to lose many of their vitamins during the manufacturing process and often have other less healthy ingredients added such as corn syrup and trans fats. Thus, the term empty calories is often used to describe foods

like soda and potato chips. Replacing processed foods in your diet with more fresh foods like fruits, vegetables and plain water helps promote a healthy diet.

The following are tips on how to practice good nutrition this month and every month:

- Eat smaller meals including a vegetable as the center of the plate, with smaller meat and starch servings. Include at least one serving of fruit and vegetable with every meal.
- Drink more water between meals; try veggies or a handful of nuts for a snack and fresh fruit for something sweet.
- Reduce your intake of deep fried foods and cancer-causing trans fats found in processed foods and baked goods.
- Read food labels and reduce the amount of added sugar, corn syrup and salt in the diet. Use fresh herbs and spices to season food instead.



Snacking can be a healthy habit instead of a guilty one. It can help keep you from consuming too many calories later, which keeps the weight away. There are plenty of healthy alternatives to most fatty choices. A good rule of thumb is to choose a snack that has plenty of nutrients, but what to choose when dreaming of a salty or sugary treat?

If you are craving something creamy, like ice cream, try a frozen yogurt. Craving candy? Try dried fruit instead. The sweet, crunchy, chewy consistency is like eating a piece of candy. If cookies are what you are craving, avoid calorie laden types such as chocolate chip, cream-filled sandwich cookies or

peanut butter and give ginger snaps a try. For chocolate lovers, substitute hot chocolate for a chocolate candy bar. Just about everybody loves potato chips, but not the fat that comes along with them. Pretzels are a much better choice and are still salty and crunchy.



Guilt-Free Eating

You can enjoy your favorite foods, even when you diet. A meal plan devoid of favorite foods is doomed to disaster, not to mention virtually impossible to follow for very long. It's too difficult for most of us to just say no to the foods we love. But we also may be afraid to allow ourselves even one bite, for fear of losing control. Here are a few tips to help you keep that control but still enjoy the foods you love.

Aim for a small total amount, maybe a small portion daily, of a favorite food. Choose foods that you like but are able to resist after you've had a small portion. For example, you'll probably never be satisfied with one or two potato chips, but one bite of cheesecake might be enough to satisfy. If a certain food is extremely hard to resist, eat it infrequently, like once a week, or not at all.

Avoid foods such as potato chips that make you hungrier or lead you to crave more. Keep only a few different favorite foods in the house at one time. Research shows that people eat more calories when there's a greater variety of treats around. Slow down. Take small bites and enjoy every one. Eat first, then have a beverage, so you can give your full attention to your food



Here are some activities that will get you moving while you're having fun:

Park activities: Hiking, kayaking, canoeing, rock climbing



Beach and water

sports: Waterskiing, bodysurfing, swimming, beach volleyball, Frisbee
Sightseeing: Learn about your city or someplace new while you shed extra pounds. One hour of leisurely walking burns almost 200 calories.

Museums and

galleries: Art museums provide comfortable, air-conditioned (or heated) spaces for walking as leisurely as you'd like, with plenty of visual stimulation.

Shopping: Walk through a mall for a good 30 minutes at moderate speed. You can fantasize about all the great clothes you'll be able to buy — in a smaller size — when you've reached your weight



Our pets are truly members of our families; they act like us and follow our directions when it comes to minimizing exercise and maximizing diet. Our cats stay indoors and watch videos of birds. Our dogs sit by us as we watch TV and then take one five-minute walk before bedtime. Our pets need to keep their weight in line and stay in shape just like

we do, and a great way to help them do it is to have them exercise. Walking or jogging with them, playing fetch, having them play with toys, swimming with them, and agility classes are some fun pet exercise options. Just make sure to consult with your veterinarian before starting your pet on any exercise program.



How to Stay Motivated and Keep Exercise Exciting

It can be easy to lose your motivation if you get bored with your exercise routine. Here's how to spice up your routine. You've done what you thought was the hard part: You started a regular exercise routine to get fit and healthy. But now you're finding out that keeping up with it is as hard as starting out in the first place. You need to keep exercising, but how do you do it without getting bored and losing motivation? Ask yourself what makes fitness fun. What motivates you most and keeps you focused and centered on a workout? These methods can help you stay focused and

interested in your exercise routine:

Find a buddy. Working out is often more enjoyable when you do it with someone else.



Set goals and a schedule. If you don't plan time for exercise and dedicate yourself to it, it's hard to stay motivated.

Push yourself. Don't work out to the point of injury, but push yourself during exercise routines — don't give up because you don't feel like it or you're tired.

Eat for exercise. Don't exercise on an empty

stomach, but don't eat a huge meal right before exercising, either.

Stick to a healthy, balanced diet for lots of energy, and have a light, healthy snack before a scheduled workout so that you don't feel hungry. To make working out a part of your lifestyle, you may need to occasionally come up with new and fun ways to exercise. Just keep your end goal in mind,—better health, fitness, and happiness,—and find ways to enjoy your workout.



The Health Benefits of Pet Ownership

Studies show that owning a pet can promote heart health, lower anxiety and depression, increase your activity, and even exercise your brain. If you're considering adopting a puppy, kitten, or other pet — or if you already own one — then you know about the companionship and fun pets add to your life. But in addition, owning a pet can boost your health.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, pets are good for cardiovascular health: Owning a pet can decrease your blood pressure and lower your cholesterol and triglyceride levels. Studies have also found that pet owners are more likely than people without pets to survive after hospitalization for a heart attack, and that owning a pet lowers anxiety and decreases feelings of loneliness and depression. Pets also help keep their owners fit, since they increase opportunities for exercise and

outdoor activities. In a study conducted by the University of Missouri in Columbia, researchers encouraged dog owners to walk their dog for 10 minutes three times a week, and gradually increase to 20 minutes five times a week over the course of a year. The dog walkers lost an average of 14 pounds.

Pets can increase the opportunity for socialization — they're a natural topic of conversation and offer a chance to connect with other pet lovers. Having a pet may increase your mental acuity. Remembering to walk and feed your pet exercises your brain, and it increases your sense of responsibility, which can be important to people.

The emotional bond between an owner and a dog, cat, or other pet can be as intense as those between humans, and it may offer many of the same psychological benefits. Caring for an animal offers a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Many pet owners believe their pets express a range of emotions.

Before you get a pet, decide honestly what you want in one. Some people want to have a more active lifestyle, some desire companionship, and others are looking for protection. In any case, you as the owner should work to foster a genuine relationship with your pet. Take into account what you will be able to handle, in terms of time, attention, and activity. Regardless of your age and abilities, you will reap the benefits of a pet if you pick the right one for your lifestyle.



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