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Dietary Guidelines 2010 Discussion Continued: Foods to Increase in Your Diet

Please welcome my guest contributor, Ms. Jennifer Murphy who is interning in our office through the Department of Agriculture. She brings a rich background in dietetics and is seeing how her education can be utilized at the County Extension Office. She is very well versed and capable of encouraging all of us to look critically at our diets and make changes to enhance our overall health.

The "MyPlate" model is composed of four sections: $\frac{1}{4}$ lean proteins, $\frac{1}{4}$ whole grains, $\frac{1}{2}$ fruits and vegetables and a side serving of a low-fat or fat-free dairy product. To make sure we are keeping this balance in our diet, we not only have to watch out daily intake of calories, we should watch what types of calories we are consuming. The new "MyPlate" model displays that half your plate should be filled with a variety of fruits and vegetables. These contain essential vitamins, minerals and fibers that may help protect us from chronic disease. Compared with people who consume only a small amount of fruits and vegetables, those who regularly consume greater amounts will reduce their risk of chronic diseases. Diseases associated with poor diets include diabetes, cardiovascular disease and certain cancers.

Learning to add vegetables and fruits to our daily diet can get confusing if we aren't accustomed to eating and cooking with variety. Try a different approach when it comes to the preparation of your plate. Here are a few ideas to try:

- Grilling is for more than just meat-I was hesitant to try grilled pineapple, mango, peppers, onions, and grape tomatoes at first, but not only is it quick and easy to clean up, it adds a twist to the flavor of many foods you've eaten raw. Served as a side or even by themselves, dipped in fresh salsa these tasty treats are delicious.
- Spruce up that salad-rather than dressing a bed of lettuce with the typical toppings, add fresh fruit and raw vegetables for a change. Berries, mandarin oranges, raw summer squash, zucchini and garbanzo beans are all yummy alternative to the customary cucumbers and tomatoes we are used to tossing on salad.

These are just a few examples of how to increase fruits and vegetables in your diet. Always remember to eat across the rainbow: eating fruits and vegetables that are colorful-red, orange, green yellow, blue and purple- typically means we are getting a wider variety of vitamins and nutrients.

Just as important as consuming the proper amount and types of fruits and vegetables is ensuring that we get an adequate amount of whole grains, the healthiest kinds of grains. The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that at least half of all the grains you eat are whole. Chances are, you eat lots of grains already, but are they whole grains? All types of whole grains are good sources of complex carbohydrates, are fortified with key vitamins and minerals, and are also naturally low in fat. A diet rich in whole grains has also been linked to a lower risk of heart disease, diabetes, certain cancers, and other health related problems.

Whole grains are unrefined grains whose bran and germ haven't been removed by milling. Whole grains are better sources of fiber and other important nutrients, such as selenium, potassium, and magnesium. Whole grains are either single foods, such as brown rice and popcorn, or ingredients in products, such as buckwheat (in pancakes, for example) or whole wheat in bread.

Easy tips to increase whole grains in your diet:

- Replace refined cereals and breads with whole grain cereals and whole grain, multigrain breads
- Use long grain or brown rice in dishes that call for white rice
- Instead of refined pasta, try whole grain pasta

By increasing whole grains in your diet, not only are you increasing your health benefits, but you will also find that you stay fuller longer.

Lean proteins are the final component of the "MyPlate" model. A maximum of $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate should include lean proteins. As Americans, we typically over eat on protein and saturated fats. Try to increase lean proteins in your diet and watch the portion size to reduce calorie and fat intake. Leaner proteins include; chicken breast, turkey breast or ground turkey breast, egg whites, legumes, lean cut beef, most seafood, and fish.

Try to include fish into your diet two to three times per week; this will increase unsaturated fat in your diet which is often referred to as "good fat". By increasing your vegetables, fruits, and grains at each meal, as I previously discussed, you will automatically find that your portion of protein will decrease.

Lastly, as you fill in your sections on your new plate don't forget about your side of dairy. Try to increase your dairy by choosing low-fat or fat-free dairy products.

- Try low-fat yogurt for a dessert.
- Replace half and half creamer with low-fat or fat-free milk in your morning cup of Joe.
- Replace heavy creams in recipes with a low-fat version.

Making the switch from whole milk to fat-free isn't easy, so try mixing 2% milk with low-fat milk and work your way down to low-fat mixed with fat-free milk. Eventually, moving to fat-free only will come more easily. It worked for me!

Remember, eating healthy and making permanent changes to your diet isn't easy. But with discipline and a gradual improvement, it can be done. By simply increasing your fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and low-fat or fat-free dairy products, we can increase our energy while decreasing the chance of a fatal disease. So let's get started!