

Shaping up: Think before you take a bite

BY JUIE THOMPSON, THE GAZETTE MARCH 2, 2011

STORY PHOTOS (1)



Gloria Tsang of HealthCastle.com with a variety of fruits and vegetables. Eat your colours, Tsang says. Photograph by: Ward Perrin, PNG

March is Nutrition Month. And I gather it's no coincidence that it's one of the longest ones, either, now that its been designated for us to think about our nutrition and aim to improve it.

So with that in mind, we asked a few dietitians to offer us some practical advice to help us achieve that nutritional balance.

* Gloria Tsang, the editor-in-chief of HealthCastle.com, says it's easy to add fruits and vegetables to every meal. "For example, you can add fresh berries to your cereal bowl and morning yogurt," says Tsang, who's based in Port Moody. "For lunch, if you eat out, order a bowl of veggie soup to top up your veggie quotient. Always bring fruit to work. Fruit like berries, grapes, apples and oranges will keep for a few hours in a lunch box. Don't forget dried fruits; they are excellent snacks on their own, and are great toppers of any dishes." At suppertime, Tsang says, try doubling your veggies. "The easiest way is to throw in veggies in the meat dish you're making. Toss in orange veggies like sweet potatoes, yam, or squash in your baked or roasted meat dish, or add double veggies in your meat stirfry."

* Lisa Rutledge of the McGill Cardiovascular Health Improvement Program suggests that we "not rely exclusively on self-control or willpower." She thinks we should focus on making healthier choices by setting specific plans for a few small changes over the next few weeks. "Build on these short-term goals every week until your target is reached." If, for instance, the goal is to eat three fruits per day, start by aiming to eat one fruit per day for a week. If it was successful, aim to add another into your day for the next week. "Succeeding with short-term goals fuels our motivation."

* Isabelle Huot of Montreal wants us to be careful with our liquid consumption. "We have a tendency to consume way too many calories in liquid form without realizing it," she explained. "Juices, energy drinks, wine, beer, lattes all contain a lot of calories with very limited nutritional benefit." She suggests spending the month monitoring what we drink and how much, and to concentrate on replacing some of the sugary, high-calorie drinks with water, milk or soy beverages, and to remember when drinking coffee or tea to try to be moderate when adding sugar.

* Silvia Bonome says there is much talk about nutrition and diet, but what she feels is especially important is to be mindful of the "fundamental principles that are the key to making our bodies work better, making it easier to achieve our goals."

Bonome says we should break the morning fast with the right fuel every day and then keep fuelling at regular intervals (every two to three hours). "Certainly, making the best food choices most often is important, but when you choose to eat will make all the difference."

Bonome says that when you eat at regular intervals, it helps burn body fat faster, build muscle, manage blood-sugar levels and can help us focus and concentrate better. "And it can even make our moods better!"

* Janice Cohen thinks we have to stop scrutinizing our results and judging our efforts "with a microscopic lens." As she points out, "two or three bad days in one week cannot and should not be allowed to emotionally override all of the good decisions of an entire month." She says if we keep this perspective, it will prevent us from spiralling into letting go or, worse yet, giving up completely.

* Ilene Gilbert wants us to stay home more. "Nobody does it better than you do when it comes to food preparation," she said. "Unless you go to a fancy restaurant or a restaurant where they have no issues making changes to the dishes offered." Sodium is something we should all be concerned with, Gilbert cautions, and you have "absolutely no control in meals prepared in most restaurants. Keep the restaurant-going for special occasions." You'll save money, too, she points out.

* West Island dietitian Kim Arrey says too often people use their lack of cooking skills as a reason for not eating well.

"There are so many options, including cooking courses offered on the Internet, you can learn from the comfort of your own home." Arrey also points out that if you don't like to cook, you can opt for frozen meals or services that offer healthy, nutritious meals that are delivered to your home.

"Take a frozen meal, add a vegetable side dish and a fruit-based dessert and you have a balanced meal."

Arrey says eating healthy does not have to be complicated. "It can be simple, quick and easy."

* Tracy Satov notes that "too much of any kind of food will cause weight gain. Making each plate one-third protein, one-third carbohydrates and the rest vegetables will nourish your body with the right ingredients to increase your metabolism, energize your muscles and strengthen your bones. Choosing the most colourful vegetables will provide a variety of nutrients and antioxidants."

* Kate Comeau and Melanie Olivier of ATP Nutrition offer up these simple tips:

Comeau says we have to learn to experiment with our food. "Our local fruits and veggies are not at their best this time of year, so be creative and find new ways to use winter's best, like a beet and goat cheese salad or a winter vegetable potage." And remember to slow down when eating. "Chew slowly and without distraction," which will not only help with digestion but also reduce such things as gas and bloating.

Olivier wants us to be wary of caffeinated energy drinks and large coffees, which may seem tempting to help us get out of bed on cold mornings to work out. "Drink a glass of water when you wake up and then make a smoothie full of fresh or frozen berries with yogourt and pair with a ginger, lemon and honey tisane one hour before training for a more sustainable boost of energy."

With a file from Vancouver Sun

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