Recipes for National Nutrition Month in March

by Erin McGraw
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We often attempt to make major lifestyle changes with the best intentions, only to find they are difficult to keep up with and leave us feeling defeated. March is National Nutrition Month®, a great reminder that healthy choices don't have to be an all or nothing commitment. This year's theme "Eat Right, Bite By Bite," reminds us that every moment (or bite of food) is an opportunity to improve our health. It's not the one major change that makes the most impact, but the small bites and daily choices that lead to one big result. Try taking a week-by-week approach to Eat Right this month.

Week 1: Eat a Variety of Foods Every Day

Choosing foods from each of the five food groups provides the variety of nutrients your body needs. As a reminder, the food groups include fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, and (of course!) dairy. Erin McGraw, registered dietitian with St. Louis District Dairy Council says "Create meals that include at least 3 food groups, and snacks that include 2 to ensure variety." Milk is a simple way to add essential nutrients to a meal, and cheese paired with fruit makes a delicious snack. Flavorful yogurt (like lemon or raspberry) with fresh fruit and granola can be a breakfast meal or served as a dessert.

Week 2: Plan Your Meals Each Week

Take time to organize what meals will look like day-to-day. Consider busy days, those that include plans for dining out, and evenings with time for a home cooked meal. Build grocery lists around that plan, incorporating new foods along with family favorites. "Milk, cheese, and yogurt are great staples to have on the list. Dairy in grab and go packaging is perfect for busier lifestyles and simple to add to snacks and meals," states McGraw. Additionally, preparing lunches the night before is a smart way to tackle the morning rush. If dining out, make your menu choice one that includes several food groups.

Week 3: Learn Skills to Create Tasty Meals

Preparing and enjoying meals at home often leads to more nutritious food choices. Whether you are a kitchen pro or new to the home cooking scene, simple tricks can help lead to healthy home cooked meals. Start by keeping healthy ingredients stocked. Remember the shopping list from Week 2? Include foods that are quick to prepare when time is short. McGraw suggests, "Incorporating a mix of easy to prepare foods, like frozen vegetables, whole grain pasta, and milk can help reduce the stress of meal preparation, while still offering a variety of nutrients." Whether sitting down to a simple or gourmet meal, enjoying it as a family means healthier foods and healthier interactions.

Week 4: Consult a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN)

For a more personalized approach, ask your healthcare provider for a referral to registered dietitian nutritionists in your community. As the experts on food and

nutrition, RDNs are qualified to give specific nutrition advice tailored to individual needs and goals. RDNs can weed out the food facts from the myths and can help make achieving personal health simple-one bite at a time!

For more information on healthy eating or dairy foods, visit www.stldairycouncil.org and eatright.org or contact Erin McGraw at St. Louis District Dairy Council: call (314) -835-9668, or e-mail emcgraw@stldairycouncil.org. Make sure to follow St. Louis District Dairy Council on Facebook or Instagram at STLDairyCouncil.

Recipes

Peanut Butter Banana Overnight Oats

With busy mornings that often run short on time, breakfast can be the first thing to go. Prepare this simple recipe with a winning flavor combination the night before and have your breakfast ready to go. Whole grains, fruit, and nutritious dairy can help start your day off on the right foot!

Servings: 1

Ingredients

1/3 cup old fashioned oats

1/3 cup low fat milk

1/3 cup plain low fat yogurt

½ medium banana, sliced, divided

2 Tbsp peanut butter

½ Tbsp honey

¼ tsp vanilla extract

¼ tsp cinnamon

1 teaspoon chia seeds (optional)

Instructions

1. Mix oats, milk, yogurt, peanut butter, honey, vanilla, cinnamon and chia seeds together in bowl.
2. Layer ½ mixture in a sealable container or jar. Top with half of the banana slices. Repeat with remaining mixture and banana slices.
3. Seal container with lid and place in refrigerator overnight.
4. Enjoy!

Nutrition Information: 440 Calories, 50 g Carbohydrates, 20 g Fat, 19 g Protein, 6.8 g Fiber, 22% Daily Value Calcium

Broccoli and Bacon Mac N Cheese

This take on a classic favorite is a great way to simply add whole grains and veggies to a quick family meal. To make preparation quicker, use frozen broccoli/cauliflower and cook turkey bacon in advance.

Servings: 6

Ingredients

1 (12-ounce) box whole wheat noodles

2 cups broccoli, chopped

8 slices turkey bacon, chopped and cooked

Cheese Sauce

¼ cup butter

¼ cup whole wheat flour

3 cups skim milk

2 ½ cups cauliflower, diced

1 cup shredded sharp Cheddar cheese

Topping

¼ cup shredded sharp Cheddar cheese

Instructions

1. Boil pot of water and cook noodles according to instructions. Steam broccoli until fairly soft, set aside.
2. Steam cauliflower for cheese sauce until very soft. In blender, blend cauliflower with 1 cup of milk until smooth.
3. Cook bacon in microwave or stove until crispy, set aside. In a large sauce pan or skillet melt butter on medium heat. Add flour and cook for about two minutes, stirring continuously.
4. Add cauliflower mixture and remaining milk, continuing to cook on medium-low until thickened. Remove from heat and add cheese. Stir until melted.
5. Add noodles and broccoli, stir until combined.
6. Transfer to baking dish, top with bacon and additional cheese. Broil 5 minutes.
7. Enjoy!

Nutrition Information: 670 Calories, 18 g Fat, 33 g Protein, 11.4 g Fiber, 30% Daily Value Calcium

Recipe adapted from milkmeansmore.org

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