

The Road to Better Nutrition

By Jimmi Buell

Polk Fit Fresh and Friendly (PF3) is an organization dedicated to making a difference in the health and wellness of Polk County. Our mission is to work together and to plan and implement effective strategies to promote wellness in our community.

A new study finds that almost half of the deaths from chronic diseases are associated with a poor diet. Death due to poor diet has now surpassed tobacco use as the leading cause of death in this country. Poor diet is more about the bad foods we do eat than the good foods we don't eat. Just 4 foods account for nearly half of all heart disease deaths in the U.S. Those foods include high sodium, processed meats, sugar-sweetened beverages and red meats (such as steak or pork chops). If people ate less salt and meat and added more nuts, fruits and vegetables to their diets, they could greatly lower their own risk of heart disease, the researchers at Tufts Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy found.

Polk Fit Fresh and Friendly is reminding everyone that March is National Nutrition Month®. Eating healthier doesn't mean changing your entire eating pattern overnight. Small changes, made over time, can add up. Start by adding one good food at a time. Try adding sea food, rich in omega-3 fatty acids, to your diet then later add another healthy food (such as more vegetables, or whole grains). It's like old question. "how do you eat an elephant?" "One bite at a time." While applicable to many of life's challenges, this seems particularly relevant to the journey toward better health.

During National Nutrition Month®, celebrated each March, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics encourages everyone to "Put Your Best Fork Forward." The 2015-2020 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend making small changes to eating patterns to include healthier ingredients while cooking at home and choosing a variety of healthful foods. By adding more fruits and vegetables to your diet along with moderate physical activity, you can help to reduce the risk of preventable, lifestyle-related chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and obesity. Evidence shows that making dietary and lifestyle changes can prevent diseases before they occur.

We encourage everyone to eat more of these foods:

Vegetables, including dark green, red and orange, beans, peas and others

Fruits, especially whole fruits, rather than juice

Whole grains, such as whole wheat, brown rice, quinoa

Fat-free or low-fat dairy including milk, yogurt, cheese and fortified soy beverages

Protein foods including seafood, lean meats, poultry, nuts, soy products, beans and peas

Oils including canola, corn, olive, peanut, sunflower and soy

Looking for ways to eat healthier? The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics offers handouts and tip sheets for incorporating more fruits and vegetables in your diet at their website at <http://>

www.eatright.org/resource/food/resources/national-nutrition-month/nnm-handouts-and-tipsheets-for-families-and-communities

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For more information on Polk Fit Fresh and Friendly and our work in the community and a list of our meeting dates, please visit our website at www.polkfitfreshandfriendly.org.