

FROM THE NUTRITIONIST

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March is National Nutrition Month

March is National Nutrition Month! It's a good time to remember that a healthful diet is one important lifestyle factor which can help you optimize physical and mental performance, achieve and maintain a healthy weight, reduce the risk of chronic disease, and promote overall good health. However, it isn't necessary to try a "total diet overhaul" in order to improve your eating habits. Small, everyday changes can add up to big results. Consistently following these little changes can lead to a healthy lifestyle.

A healthy eating plan is based on nutrient-rich foods and beverages from all the food groups: fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, and protein foods, and is limited in sugar, sodium, and saturated fat. Choosing a variety of foods from each group helps ensure the right nutrition for good health.

Take some time to look at your own eating habits: are you missing any food groups in your day-to-day eating? Do you find yourself eating the same foods day after day? Do you only choose foods and drinks that taste good, even if they're not nutritious? Do you know you could eat better, but don't know where to begin? If your answer to any of these questions is "yes" try some of these suggestions:

- Use half your plate for fruits and vegetables and the other half for grains and protein, with a serving of milk or yogurt on the side
- Add nutrition to your morning with a veggie-filled omelet and whole wheat toast
- Choose pizza topped with veggies for an extra boost of nutrition
- Try a food you've never eaten before – you might find a new favorite!
- Pick veggies with hummus or low-fat dressing when you need a healthy snack
- Add an apple, orange or banana to every meal and easily meet your fruit goal
- Load up a salad with colorful fruits and veggies to add flavor and nutrients
- Choose more whole grains like whole wheat bread and pasta, brown rice, and quinoa which have more flavor and nutrition than refined grains
- Quench your thirst with water instead of drinks with added sugars
- Opt for foods that are grilled, baked, broiled or steamed more often than foods that are fried
- Use your favorite veggies and salad dressing to make a healthy wrap
- Ask for a double portion of veggies at mealtimes and easily meet your vegetable goal
- Try non-meat sources of protein such as beans, nuts, seeds, and tofu
- Make a healthy banana split for dessert: top a sliced banana with frozen yogurt and nuts
- Replace jelly in a peanut butter sandwich with sliced bananas or mashed berries

Andrea Hart, registered dietitian nutritionist and New York state-certified dietitian/nutritionist, is available for free, confidential, one-on-one counseling and as a speaker or facilitator for campus groups, panels or classes.