



Starting the New Year Off With Healthy Living

Happy 2012! It is January, right? One step outside and you may believe it is April in Colorado! All of this warmer weather and no snow make me want to get outside and exercise. So, instead of lecturing about what we should or should not be eating, drinking or doing, I want to speak about wellness. We could do a web search on family wellness, read a book on wellness, or even hire a personal trainer. Guess what! We don't need to get that crazy about it! I want to give you and your family some tools to live a healthier, happier life without spending a lot of time or money.

First of all, let's talk about food. We hear a lot of conversations about eating fresh fruits and vegetables. This is fairly easy to accomplish in the summer months when we can visit the Farmer's Market or grow our own garden. It is not so easy in the winter months. In the summer, instead of a green lawn, why not plant a garden? We water our lawn to produce green grass, but if you plant a vegetable garden, you'll get green color AND food!

Oh, that's right, it's January. Well, container gardening is another option. And, yes you can plant indoors in January or February. Herbs can be easily grown in a windowsill herb garden. Purchase the seeds and soil and plant in a container such as an old soup pot or even an old shoe. Experimenting with herbs and spices can be a fresh new way to liven up some of your family's favorite dishes. A couple of things to consider ...fresh is best, frozen is next, then canned. Canned foods tend to be higher in sodium (salt) which can raise blood pressure eventually. The beginnings of heart disease are seen in children as young as five years of age. Cooking with herbs and spices instead of salt can have long-term health benefits for the entire family.

Balance your plate--A simple way to ensure your family's meals are balanced is to use the "plate method". This means half your plate is vegetables or salad, one quarter is protein (chicken, fish, red meat, eggs, nuts), and one quarter is carbohydrates (breads, pasta, starchy vegetables). This method is a good way for the whole family to eat to ward off heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and overweight and obesity.

A few other tidbits to consider: partially hydrogenated soybean oil (otherwise known as transfat) and high fructose corn syrup. These are two products that wreak havoc with our health. To determine which products contain these items, look at the ingredients list. Partially hydrogenated soybean oil is commonly found in commercially prepared baked goods, fried foods (the oil they are cooked in), bottled salad dressings, and margarine. Extra virgin olive oil is the healthiest choice in oils, but can be expensive. Canola oil is also a good choice and much cheaper. High fructose corn syrup is a man-made sugar. It is found in soda, candy, granola bars, bottled salad dressings, and commercially baked goods. Try to limit these ingredients as much as possible to take care of your heart, decrease your risk of diabetes, and just plain feel better. These ingredients are mostly found in packaged and processed foods.

Some healthier suggestions: in place of soda, try seltzer water with slices of orange, lemon or frozen fruit to flavor it. If it is candy you like, try dark chocolate with raw almonds and dried fruit. This snack is high in antioxidants which are good for our hearts. The closer our foods are to whole, the better they are for our health. Please notice I am not saying that you can no longer eat your favorite foods. Enjoy all the foods you love, but in moderation.

Now for the active living...think back to the first paragraph where I mentioned our wonderful Colorado weather. Although we will be short on moisture this spring, the mild winter we are experiencing entitles us to get outside to exercise rather than exercising indoors. Enjoy walking, jogging, or riding your bicycle around our many trails and parks. If you have a Recreation Center pass, enjoy swimming, a game of family basketball, or a "Bootylicious" class. The current recommendation from the American Heart Association and the American Diabetes Association is 30 minutes of exercise 5 days a week. Ten minutes of brisk walking, three times daily counts too. Now that sounds doable! My point is that you don't have to beat yourself up to enjoy good health and wellness. Try to make good choices daily, but if you slip up and have a donut, do as Frank Sinatra would do "pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again!"

Happy New Year and Be Well.