

Caregiver's Corner Column (January 2013)

Healthy After the Holidays

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It is no secret that caregiving can be stressful, and it can be easy to fall into a routine of eating out, ordering pizza, or picking up takeout. One thing that caregivers can do to keep themselves and their loved ones healthy is eat a balanced diet. Now that the busy holiday season is over, it is a good time to make some healthy changes.

So what exactly is a balanced diet? An easy tool to use for this is MyPlate, which was released in 2011 and replaced MyPyramid. MyPlate encourages that half of your plate be filled with fruits and vegetables and the other half be filled with protein and grains. I always encourage people to place a picture of MyPlate on their refrigerator as a reminder of what each meal should look like. For more information and tips, you can visit www.choosemyplate.gov.

Let's look at fruits and vegetables, which provide essential vitamins and minerals needed by our bodies. You might have heard that fresh vegetables are the best option, and while this is often true, frozen and canned options can also be just as healthy and are more affordable when the fresh versions are not in season. They are also easy to keep on hand in the pantry or freezer and add to the meal without adding a lot of preparation time. When buying frozen vegetables, look for vegetables frozen without salt, and when buying canned vegetables, look for those with "low sodium" or "no salt added" on the label. Stay away from frozen vegetables with cream or cheese sauces. The same principle holds true for fruit. When buying frozen fruit, look for varieties that do not have added sugar listed on ingredient list, and when buying canned fruit, choose options that are canned in water or 100% juices. You want to stay away from varieties with heavy syrup.

Now let's look at the other half of your plate. When choosing grain products, you want to select whole grains. Whole grains are important, because they contain fiber and when eaten regularly can help lower your risk of certain chronic diseases. When determining if the bread you are about to purchase is a whole grain or not, look at the ingredient list. The first ingredient listed should include the word "whole" for example: "whole grain" or "whole wheat". For protein, you want to choose lean meats, such as chicken, pork, or ground beef that is at least 90% lean. It is also important to trim all visible fat before cooking and drain fat during the cooking process. When selecting milk, choose a low-fat option, 1% or less.

Another tip that I encourage caregivers to do is make out a menu for the week and grocery shop. It is much easier to eat healthy if you have everything you need at your house to follow the menu. I also encourage caregivers to freeze leftovers for busy days or those that just aren't going as planned, and don't be afraid to ask family members to bring over dinner once a week.

Questions that I often receive around the New Year include "How can I lose weight quickly?" or "Is this diet I saw on a TV commercial safe for me?" Unfortunately, there is no magic pill or diet for losing weight. A healthy weight loss plan includes a healthy eating plan and exercise. Stay away from diets that exclude a food group. These diets are fad diets, and excluding food groups will cause you to miss out on important vitamins and minerals that your body needs.

Remember that your health is important and now is a great time to make positive, healthy changes!

Caregiver's Corner is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at www.CaregiverResource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.