



Pro Kinship for Kids

Kinship Link

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Newsletter by



March is National Nutrition Month Beyond the Table

The theme for 2024 March National Nutrition Month inspires us to look Beyond the Table when thinking about our health and the environment. Family meals are important, but healthy choices go beyond the foods and drinks we enjoy while sitting at the lunch or dinner table. They include our snacks, breakfast, eating out with friends and family, and even where foods are grown and how they're prepared. Our good choices also can affect the health of our planet. Have you ever thought about the work that goes into producing the foods we eat? This includes how food is grown or raised, where and how it is made, as well as, its safety. It's important to think about the foods we eat and the nutrition they provide, but is there more we could be doing to improve our health and the environment?

These are a few tips to help you reach Beyond the Table:

Focus on healthy eating routine

Making healthy food choices may seem difficult at times, especially when eating away from home, but it doesn't have to be.

Many eating places provide nutrition information right on the menu or online to help you choose healthier options. When purchasing foods from a store, use a grocery list and pay attention to sales. You also can learn about resources in your community that offer access to healthy foods, such as the food shelf or farmer's market.

Learn what's involved in growing your food

There are many ways you can learn about how your food is produced. Visit a local farm or farmer's market and talk with the people who are growing and harvesting your food. Many farmers and food producers will be happy to answer your questions, let you sample products, or provide recipes for foods that are new to you. Some local farms even have tours, so people can see how they operate.

You can also grow your own fruits and vegetables at home. Want to try gardening, but have limited space? Grow herbs or lettuce indoors. Tomatoes, peppers, or strawberries may work, too, if you have a patio or porch with enough sunlight.

Community gardens are another option for gardening. Here you can participate in the growing process and share in the harvest.

Supporting farmers by buying locally grown and seasonal foods can help you eat with the environment in mind. Other steps include decreasing food waste which we will share more about later in this newsletter. It can be creating new dishes from leftovers or by composting. Adding more plant-based food to your meals and snacks is another great why to get more healthy foods in your diet.

National Nutrition Month is a great time to start thinking about how you can go Beyond the Table to improve both your health and the planet's.



Eating Right and Reducing Food Waste

People rarely talk about the foods they toss out, yet the topic of food waste is getting a lot more attention these days. It has been estimated that Americans throw away billions of pounds of food each year either at home or when eating out. And that amount doesn't even include the food that goes uneaten at the grocery store or the crops that are left in farmers' fields. Not all food that is wasted can be saved and eaten, but it's been proven that a lot of food waste could be prevented, especially at home. A good place to start is right in your own kitchen.

Here are a few tips that will help:

Plan Meals Based on the Foods You Already Have on Hand

- ◆ Look in the refrigerator, freezer, and pantry for foods that need to be used up.
- ◆ Write a list of the ingredients you still need to buy to use what you have on hand.
- ◆ Buy only the amount of perishable foods that can be eaten or frozen within a few days. This is especially true for foods, like fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, dairy products, and seafood.

Get Creative with Leftovers

- * Transform meals into soups, salads or sandwiches by cutting up leftover veggies and cooked meats.
- * Use cooked meats as a topping for salads or cooked grains like rice or

pasta.

- * Wrap in a tortilla or stuff into a pita for a satisfying sandwich your leftovers from a meal.
- * Combine to make soup, then enjoy or freeze for future use.
- * Eat as a leftover meal later in the week.
- * Simply brown bag the leftovers for lunch.

Master the Shelf Life of Foods

Many foods and drinks purchased at the grocery store include a date, which indicates when it should be used by or sold by. Because these dates refer to the product's quality, it doesn't necessarily mean they should be thrown out.

- "Use by", "Best by", and "Best before" dates are found on foods, such as mustard, salad dressing, and ketchup. These products usually don't need to be refrigerated until opened. In many cases, they are safe to eat beyond the date as long as they have been stored properly.
- "Sell By" dates are displayed on perishable foods, such as meat and dairy products. It's possible these foods may be used a few days after that date, as long as they were stored at a safe temperature.

Practice Good Food Safety

- ◇ Don't risk eating or drinking anything that you suspect has spoiled.
- ◇ Eat leftovers within 3 to 4 days (or

freeze for up to 3 to 4 months)

- ◇ Test your food safety knowledge or find out if it's time to toss those foods by going to www.foodsafety.gov
- ◇ Create ideal storage conditions.
- ◇ Store foods in the pantry, so that products with closer dates are up front.
- ◇ Place foods that could spoil quickly within sight, such as in the front of the refrigerator or on the counter (if they're not perishable). Wait to wash produce until right before serving.
- ◇ Learn which fruits and vegetables to store in the refrigerator. Some produce will cause other fruits and vegetables to ripen quickly so they need to be separated. And others should be stored in a cool, dark, dry place.

Other Ways to Go Further with Food

- Be mindful of portion sizes. Choose smaller portions to stay within your calorie needs, as recommended for your age and activity level.
- Order smaller sizes of foods and drinks when eating away from home. Or ask for a to-go container at the start of a meal.
- Learn how to properly can or dehydrate foods at home.
- Donate extra foods that are still safe to eat to a local food shelf.
- Consider composting your food waste.



6 Health Tips

1. Experiment with Plant-Based Meals

Expand variety in your menus with budget-friendly meatless meals. Many recipes that use meat and poultry can be made without. Vegetables, beans, and lentils are all great substitutes. Try including one meatless meal per week to start.

2. Explore New Foods and Flavors

Add more nutrition and eating pleasure by expanding your range of food choices. When shopping, make a point of selecting a fruit, vegetable, or whole grain that's new to you or your

family.

3. Reduce Added Sugar

Foods and drinks with added sugars can contribute empty calories and little or no nutrition. Review the new and improved Nutrition Facts Label or ingredients list to identify sources of added sugars.

4. Slow Down at Mealtime

Instead of eating on the run, try sitting down and focusing on the food you're about to eat. Dedicating time to enjoy the taste and textures of foods can have a positive effect on your food intake.

5. Enact Family Meal Time

Plan to eat as a family at least a few times each week. Set a regular mealtime. Turn off the TV, phones and other electronic devices to encourage mealtime talk. Get kids involved in meal planning and cooking and use this time to teach them about good nutrition.

6. Drink More Water

Quench your thirst with water instead of drinks with added sugars. Stay hydrated and drink plenty of water, especially if you are active, or live or work in hot conditions.