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Health experts offer tips to help Missourians 'Eat Right'

Awareness effort part of National Nutrition Month activities during March

Many people sacrifice their health by making poor food choices, often because of time constraints and budget pinches. But the state health department and most local health departments have experts available to help residents create meals that keep their families healthy.

These dietitians are a great resource for Missourians looking to find healthier choices in the food they eat, said Pat Kramer, a registered dietitian and nutrition coordinator for the state Department of Health and Senior Services. She encourages residents to take advantage of the free or low-cost advice that these registered dietitians can offer to help them save money and eat right.

"These days, people have many competing demands, including time and food prices, when it comes to choosing what to eat," Kramer said. "When comparing cost per serving, fruits and vegetables are just as affordable as other less healthy foods, and eating fruits and vegetables every day may save consumers even more in the long run as they spend fewer dollars on health care."

Kramer's advice comes as the nation begins to mark National Nutrition Month in March. This year's theme is "Eat Right," as state nutritionists encourage residents to change their eating habits to maximize their health now and throughout the year.

Here are some simple tips for healthy eating:

- Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables. If fresh produce is too expensive, go for frozen.
- Use smaller plates. This is an automatic way of managing portion sizes.
- Read the "Nutrition Facts" panel on the foods you buy to know whether you are getting the nutrients you need. Look for products that are good sources of fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium and iron.
- Satisfy your hunger with nutrient-rich foods, such as brightly colored fruits and vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products and lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, and beans.
- Cook once and eat twice. Take leftovers for lunch to forgo trips to fast food restaurants.

Kramer said professionals are available to help consumers gather the best information about the food they eat.

"There are 1,500 registered dietitians in Missouri who are trained to examine scientific studies in order to separate nutrition facts from fiction," said Kramer. "Dietitians are required to stay current on nutrition science to maintain their credentials."

For more information on how to find a registered dietitian, consumers can contact their local county health department or hospital or go to <http://www.eatright.org/> and click on the "Find a Nutrition Professional" tab.

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