

York University Staff Association Health and Wellness News and Views

Ever wonder how entire families stay healthy, and fit? Families that make healthy lifestyle choices together, stay healthy together. It's never been more important to protect your physical health as well as the health of your family. Recent studies show that obesity rates among children and adolescents have nearly doubled in the last 20 years. It is estimated now that one out of seven children aged 6-19 is overweight or obese. (Obese is defined as 20 percent over your maximum desired body weight.)

Food experts say that parents hold the key to good health and nutrition. It is important for the health of families to plan and share family meals together. Statistics show that the family that eats healthfully, consuming colourful fruits and vegetables, lean meats and foods low in sugar, fat and salt, does so by eating healthy home cooked meals together. When families come together to eat, they create an emotional harmony that is pretty sacred for long – term health.

Controlling your own ingredients rather than relying on fast food makes it easier to eat healthy. Set good examples by eating properly and making good choices. Children often mimic the eating habits of adults in the household. Keep healthy foods in the house. Talk to your kids about smart eating and encourage them to call you out if you grab junk food. Kids love feeling empowered. It makes them feel like part of the solution instead of feeling singled out as the only ones who have to follow healthy eating habits.

If you and your family choose to eat out, make the right choices. Avoid Super-sized meals high in saturated fats and low in protein and fiber. Many fast food restaurants offer “heart healthy” choices at regular sized portions. Don't be afraid to ask for a take home box if the portions are too large.

To stay at a healthy weight you have to **eat**, not starve yourself. If you don't fuel up regularly, you'll become insatiably hungry, causing the “hunger” hormone, ghrelin, to spike. It takes a half hour for that hormone to return to normal once you start to eat, but in 30 minutes you'll likely eat many more calories than if you hadn't eaten on an empty stomach.

Here are 4 Super foods to keep handy for both you and your family to snack on.

Broccoli – is simply the best medicine we have. Eaten cooked or raw it is packed with nutrients. Broccoli gets

toxins out of your liver like no other medicine or food.

Eggs – make a great inexpensive, protein-rich meal. I boil a dozen a week and add them to a salad. My kids will even grab them for a quick snack. Think beyond breakfast. Whip up dinner fast with a veggie omelet and a green salad. Don't mind the yolks either, unless you have a cholesterol concern, if that's the case stick with the egg whites.

Dark Chocolate – Look for chocolate that contain 70 percent cocoa. It actually counts as a health food. The reason: This high quality, slightly bitter chocolate contains flavonoids (natural chemicals with antioxidant properties) that improve blood vessel function. Keep dark chocolate in the house for your family to treat themselves to. Enjoy an ounce or two a day. Not milk chocolate though... it's actually not chocolate, just milk fat with a chocolate coating.

Almonds – I can't seem to say enough great things about nuts. Because nuts are so high in fiber and protein, they will satisfy you so you'll never be hungry. Almonds are the most nutritionally dense nut. Almonds are particularly heart healthy because they contain monounsaturated fats.

Get up and Get Moving!

Turn off the TV, computer and video game. The connection between obesity and TV is undeniable. First there is the junk food - the ads make you and your families crave it, and what goes better with an evening of watching TV than a bag of chips or popcorn. Time spent in front of the TV is time spent NOT being physically active. Experts suggest that for every hour that you and your family spend in front of the TV or computer, you should also spend the same amount of time exercising or getting involved in some other physical activity. Exercising and participating in activities as a family can also aid in your family's spiritual and emotional well-being. Getting your whole family involved in physical activity shouldn't require bribes or threats. If you make exercise a priority it's amazing how the rest will follow.

Ask your child to perform chores that require physical activity but that can be fun. For example, washing a car, gardening or raking leaves will get their hearts pumping. Keep it fun by having a water fight after cleaning the car, or having a race to see who can make the biggest heap of leaves. Then jump in the winning pile. Though the chore may end up taking a little longer to complete the results will be worth it. A family that plays together stays together!

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