

# Keeping the Family Healthy – Making Food Choices That Impact Your Life



By Gina Love-Walker, M.D.

March is National Nutrition Month. Providing healthy meals and making smart choices at the grocery store are market will provide both immediate and long term health

benefits. The stability of the family depends on the head of the family taking their health seriously and actively promoting a healthy lifestyle for those under their care—starting with serving foods which enhance life. I often hear patients say that eating healthy and providing the family with more wholesome meals is too restrictive, too expensive, too bland in taste, or simply that they just are not sure what choices to make. Eating foods that are rich in anti-oxidants, low in saturated fat, protein-rich or high in fiber are excellent choices for “eating to live.” There are also specific foods that will aid in reducing cancer risk and recurrence. Let me add, watch portion sizes. It is easy to overeat when you know that the food is a healthy choice. There is such a thing as “too much of a good thing.”

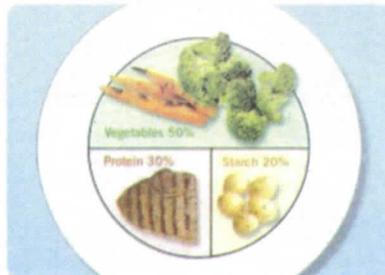
The key to a successful transition to a healthier eating plan that is permanent is to keep an open mind, be willing to try something different, be creative and incorporate some new ingredients into a favorite recipe. Shop the perimeter instead of the middle aisles at your grocery store because that is where the healthiest foods are. Get your children involved. They may be more apt to try a new vegetable that they help to select. There are advantages to cooking and eating together as a family. Research has consistently shown that teens who eat at least 5 meals a week with family are less likely to use drugs, alcohol or tobacco, and are nearly twice as likely to report a positive relationship with their parents and siblings.

## Here are some suggestions:

Fresh or frozen foods are preferred over canned. Too often canned foods are full of salt. If you must eat canned vegetables, rinse them well. Choose vegetables that are darker in color.

**Omega-3 fatty acids** are great for heart health, skin and are natural anti-inflammatory agents. *Steamed fresh broccoli, walnuts and fatty fish e.g. salmon, mackerel, lake trout, sardines and herring*

**Fiber** reduces cholesterol and helps with constipation. *Baked sweet potatoes, dried prunes, apples (leave the skin on), regular oatmeal (not instant), broccoli, leafy lettuce (not iceberg which has little nutritional value), and beans.*



## Portion Control: Your Visual Guide to Serving Sizes



**Slow the rate of mental decline (dementia) and improve memory.** *Spinach (full of calcium, vitamin A and vitamin C), Kale (a true superfood!), mustard and turnip greens (no added pork), a cup of black or green brewed tea.*

**Lower cholesterol and improve blood sugar.** *Snack on unsalted nuts including pecans, almonds and cashews.*

**Cancer-fighting foods (rich in antioxidants).** Eat plenty of dark, leafy vegetables—kale, spinach, broccoli and cabbage. Cooked tomatoes and tomato paste. Minimize grilled red meat and well-done steaks. Use extra virgin olive oil. *Try kale chips Instead of potato chips: toss cut Kale leaves in olive oil and a little sea salt or garlic salt and bake until crisp. They look ugly, but taste great! Eat dark fresh or frozen berries.*

**Healthy Swaps:** *Plain Greek yogurt (very high in protein) for Sour Cream. Apple sauce instead of butter, olive oil instead of shortening. Whole grain instead of white bread.*

**Protein for healthy muscles.** *Limit red meat. Turkey or Black bean burgers instead of beef burgers. Nuts, quinoa (can cook and add to salads, soups or serve as a side dish), Greek yogurt is a great protein source.*

Eat to live, but don't live to eat. Drink plenty of water (at least 8 cups per day). Making a conscious choice to eat and serve healthier meals and snacks will positively impact your overall health, energy and memory. You will have a healthy glow because what you put in definitely shows. Eating as a family strengthens the family unit. Bon appétit!

Additional information available at [www.cdc.gov/nutrition/everyone/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/everyone/index.html); [www.diabeticlivingonline.com](http://www.diabeticlivingonline.com); [www.casacolumbia.org](http://www.casacolumbia.org)