Veggies and Fruit

The month of July is coined the National Parks & Recreation Month as well as National Picnic Month. It makes perfect sense because many people vacation during the month of July. It is a perfect time to fire up the grill to cook your meals outside. The celebration of July 4th also brings family and friends together for good food and outdoor fun.

You have had a few weeks to “be just a little bit better” when it comes to meal planning. Let’s continue the conversation. I know there will be many picnics, barbeques, parties, and dining experiences this month so let’s “keep the goal the goal” and for this month work on eating at least 5 servings of vegetables a day. If there is an optimal season to establish a habit such as this one, this is the season to do it because you can get your hands on so many fresh vegetables and fruits from your own garden or the farmers market.

What’s a serving?

Make a fist. That's one serving. E-Z! All you have to do is get five of those fists of veggies a day. If you are already a produce-eating ninja, then polish your vegetable consumption skills and get more than 5 servings, try new vegetables, try new ways of prepping or cooking familiar favorites, or aim for more dark leafy greens. If you are new to eating our plant friends, feel free to mix up veggies and colorful fruit to help you transition to eating more vegetables per day.

Veggies & Fruits – Nature’s Medicine Cabinet

Veggies and fruits are nutritional powerhouses. They contain essential vitamins and minerals along with phytochemicals (plant chemicals) and antioxidants. They are the foundation of every high-quality, health-promoting diet. If I had to recommend just one thing that would dramatically reduce the risk of chronic disease and help shed fat, eating at least five servings of veggies per day would be it.

But veggies and fruits aren't just great for your body. They're great for your psychology too. The first thing most people do when starting a diet is focus on what they can eliminate. “I
have got to get rid of X and quit eating so much Y. And no more Z!” That feels logical, but it also feels a bit depressing and depriving because now all you can think of is what you are not eating.

But what if we can eat more? As in more of the right foods? As in consuming an abundance of Nature's delicious and nutritious bounty? That sounds more fun and in practice, it works a lot better - Our bodies regulate appetite, in part, based on the volume of food. Our stomachs have stretch receptors that sense how much stuff is in there, and our intestinal tract knows when it is full of fiber and water. Vegetables and fruits have a lot of nutrients and a lot of volume (from fiber and water), but they do not have a lot of calories. When you eat more vegetables, you can eat more food, with more valuable nutrients. You feel fuller, healthier, and more energetic - And you still get lean.

Focus on food quality

Check out this fun little visual comparison between things that are all 200 calories.

Which ones do you think would be better for you to eat? Which ones have more nutrients and more volume?

Now that you know why veggies and fruits are healthy and how they can help you lose fat, what kinds should you eat?

Eat the Rainbow

The more colors, the more nutrients. Experiment with as many vegetables and fruits as possible. "Eat the rainbow" and enjoy a wide variety of colorful veggies and fruits. For a complete list of vegetables, click here. For a complete list of fruits, click here.

Have fun trying new stuff! It all counts towards your 5 servings a day. And remember, EAT SLOWLY and mindfully because changing how you eat, will often change what you eat.

(Article inspired by Precision Nutrition Lean Eating Program)
Healthy Eating

I have zucchini and tomatoes growing out of my ears it seems. My garden is plentiful, believe me, I am not complaining. I am spending a lot of time looking for new salad recipes and creative meals in order to eat all of my fresh veggies – a pastime that I do not mind doing because it calms me PLUS I get to EAT good fresh food! Here are a couple of easy recipes to try.

Caprese Zoodles

Ingredients:
4 large zucchini
2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and fresh ground pepper to taste
2 cups cherry tomatoes, halved
1 cup mozzarella balls, quartered if large
¼ cup fresh basil leaves
2 tbsp balsamic vinegar

Directions:
1 Using a spiralizer, create zoodles out of zucchini OR use a grater.
2 Add zoodles to a large bowl, toss with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Let marinate 15 minutes.
3 Add tomatoes, mozzarella and basil to zoodles and toss until combines.
4 Drizzle with balsamic and serve.

Veggie Bake (on the grill)

Ingredients:
1 large zucchini, cut into ¼ inch thick slices
2 large bell peppers (choose your color), cut into ¼ inch thick slices
1 cup cherry tomatoes
1 small eggplant, chopped into chunks
1 red onion, cut into ¼ thick inch rings
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, for drizzling
Salt and fresh ground pepper to taste
2-3 tbsp torn basil, for garnish

Directions:
1 Preheat the grill to medium.
2 In a large bowl, combine all the vegetables, garlic and olive oil. Season with salt and pepper and toss to coat.
3 Transfer vegetables to a grilling basket. Grill 4 inches from the heat, turning once, until the vegetables are cooked through and lightly charred, about 20 minutes.
4 Transfer to a serving bowl, sprinkle with torn basil leaves and serve.