



Healthy Eating

by MARIE WALL

It is interesting that when I speak with people about nutrition and healthy weight it is clear that most people know what is required for healthy eating. Some media campaigns have been successful in educating us about what we need to eat, what we need to limit and how much exercise we are supposed to complete for a healthy lifestyle. The disconnect appears to be in knowing what we should do and actually doing it. Most of us know that we should eat five to ten fruits and vegetables, to eat whole grains, to decrease fat intake and to drink eight glasses of water each day. Translating the knowing into doing is essential. This article will focus on two areas of healthy eating: personal commitment and tips for developing healthy eating habits.

For most of us, our relationship to food and eating centers around what is easiest and familiar. Being creatures of habit, changing how we eat depends on transforming old patterns and creating new ones. You may feel bombarded with facts and figures regarding healthy eating but it seems that real change occurs for very personal reasons. Every person I have spoken to about making radical change has a story, a precipitating event that provoked action. It is my contention that while the realization may be instantaneous, the changes are learned and need time to become ingrained into one's life.

Change demands a personal decision. All of us can watch another person's challenge with health, to see the contributing factors to disease and not embrace the change ourselves. There are some characteristics in humans that "protect" us, a denial mechanism that makes us think "not me". In my experience, only very personal reasons – be it a near death experience, a number on a scale, a new relationship – some event that makes us look at our lives and ask, "Is this really how I am meant to be?". When the answer is "No, I am more than this," we have the real potential for change.

For me, it began four years ago. At age 40 I started the first diet of my life. I had always been athletic and active so unfortunately I never noticed my body ballooning to a size 18. I knew I had "a little weight" on, but I honestly thought that clothes were being sized smaller. Being tall, I could buy clothes that covered

up my size, I thought. My precipitating event was elevated cholesterol levels. Deciding to lose weight and get in shape was the first step, a major step, but only one of many decisions that have been made. Some decisions had to be made over and over.

I had lost weight three times in the past four years, but this time I had to decide to lose the weight and maintain a healthy level. This time it finally clicked – eating healthy to lose weight is one thing; creating a healthy lifestyle – nutrition and exercise – needs to be a way of life.

There are two critical questions which need to be answered. Where are you now and where do you want to be in a year's time? What are the changes you need to make in order to reach your desired destination?

In the goal to attain a healthy weight, exercise is not enough. While walking or working out three to five times a week can help us feel better, it is only when it is combined with healthy eating that we can achieve the true payoffs. Making changes to our eating habits is essential to a healthy lifestyle. Most of us grow up with similar diets and it is interesting to note that many of us are unsure of the nutritional content or caloric value of food.

In changing eating habits there are three things that can really help: keep it simple, have a menu and have the ingredients available for preparation. Most people cook and eat the same fare over and over. This comes from the need to keep things simple and familiar. Just consider a typical Newfoundland and Labrador home 40 years ago. The menu may have included boiled dinner on Sunday with the leftovers on Monday, beans on Tuesday, and fish the next day. You get the idea. Most people ate the same one or two breakfast items every day. In creating a healthy eating lifestyle it is less important to have something different every day, but rather to have foods that are satisfying and simple to prepare.

In changing the way you eat, one suggestion would be to work on one mealtime until the desired comfort is attained before addressing the next. Consider breakfast. There seems to be those who have to eat breakfast and others who don't. All of the literature says that a healthy breakfast, such as fruit and an egg or oatmeal and cottage cheese, can be

quick to prepare and nourishing. For those who cannot eat breakfast, consider packing a healthy snack to eat at break time, instead of the quick (usually high fat) snacks that may be available in the staff room.

Once the comfort level of eating a healthy breakfast is attained, then focus on lunch. This may take a little more planning, but if you create a few choices that you like, preparation time will be cut down and a satisfying lunch will go a long way in keeping your energy high. In the same way, create nutritious evening meals that are quick and balanced with protein, vegetables and fruit. Get a few recipes you enjoy and add new ones as you desire.

In order to support ease in creating healthy eating habits, a weekly menu plan can really help. I have often heard that the most difficult aspect of food preparation is deciding what to cook. Making that decision when you are tired and hungry is doubly troubling. By creating a menu, two things are accomplished: the guess work is eliminated and the ingredients can be in the house before hand. Preparing a menu plan can also be a great way to involve the whole family. Within a month your family will have developed four weekly menus, which can be rotated. Yes, there is work up front, but the benefit is to simplify the daily routine of nutritious eating.

By focusing on changing eating habits one step at a time until you are comfortable, it will give you confidence and the encouragement of success. Once new patterns are developed it will be easier to maintain the new choices. You can assess the benefits as you go.

One of the things I have come to understand is a working knowledge of healthy, balanced eating and this is something many of us have to learn. There are numerous books and programs available to assist in this effort and the key is finding one that works for you. I found that while recipe books are useful, *The Formula* by Gene and Joyce Daoust, showed how to prepare menus for each meal that included all the food groups and appropriate portions.

Health and wellness is multi-faceted and the benefits are not just personal, but can also benefit those around you. When you are feeling good, your family and students will also profit. Taking time and paying attention to eating will go a long way in your self-care. It may take some effort initially, but it will get easier in time. Take steps towards eating healthier and let the successes build on each other.

Marie Wall is an EAP Coordinator with the Employee Assistance Program for teachers. For confidential assistance contact Marie Wall (ext. 265) or Kathy Taylor-Rogers (ext. 242).

Teachers Go Healthy Contest

Have you ever gone to work and at some time during the day thought "What are we going to have for supper?" This contest is aimed at trying to assist teachers so that this is no longer a tedious, energy zapping chore.



The Challenge: Develop an easy, well-balanced, weekly meal plan with recipes for breakfast, lunch and dinner based on a seven-day week. Meals must be simple to make, easy on the budget and well-balanced.

Contest Open To: Active teachers, which includes substitute teachers and any teachers on approved leaves of absence.

The Judging: Deadline for entries is **March 2, 2007**. Each entry will be judged based on three criteria: nutritional content of meals, ease of preparation and cost effectiveness. **Hint:** the Internet is a great resource.

The Prize: \$250 worth of grocery certificates – a good start to healthy eating.

The Employee Assistance Coordinators will announce the winning entry in the April edition of *The Bulletin*. We plan to take a selection of the top entries and put together a Healthy Eating cookbook featuring a selection of the contest entries which we will then make available to help teachers make meal planning simpler.

Please forward entries to:

Teachers Go Healthy Contest
Employee Assistance Program for Teachers
3 Kenmount Road
St. John's, NL A1B 1W1



Don't forget to include your name, school, school address, telephone and email on your entry. Good Luck!