



**For Immediate Release:** March 12, 2004

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## **National Nutrition Month Promotes Healthy Choices**

“Eat Smart, Stay Healthy” is the theme for National Nutrition Month 2004. The registered dietitians at Tri-County Health Department are reminding everyone throughout March that it is a great time to start making positive changes in eating habits or to get back on track. Eating smart to stay healthy means being smart about the foods you eat, knowing what is in the foods, and making wise food choices for the entire family.

A healthy lifestyle is the key to looking good, feeling great and being the best at work and play. Weight control is a serious problem, with half of all Americans now considered “overweight” and 30 percent considered “obese.” The primary concerns of obesity are health, not appearance. Excess weight can cause heart disease, diabetes, cancer, arthritis, breathing problems and premature death. Healthy eating is proven to help reduce weight, and prevent or reverse many of these problems.

“Everyone needs to pay attention to excessive portion sizes,” states Joy Ranum, Director of Nutrition at Tri-County Health Department. “If you just can’t pass up the perceived value of a larger portion, go ahead and order it. Then immediately divide all the food in half and share the meal, or take the remaining half home for leftovers. That way you can feel proud that you cut both the price and the calories in half!”

The nutritionists also offer the following suggestions:

- Whatever the food, eat a sensible portion. Knowing the appropriate serving size is part of eating smart and not consuming excessive calories. If you look closely on the nutrition label, many “Single Serving” packages actually contain two or more servings, so the calorie count can be misleading.
- Actively pursue variety and explore new tastes. Eating a wide variety of foods not only provides optimal nutrition, it provides the pleasurable aspects of eating. For example, try a new fruit or vegetable in addition to your usual grocery store picks. Try a new food or recipe at least once a month, whether prepared at home or something new from a local ethnic restaurant.

- Pay attention to color. Eat fruits and vegetables in many different colors to be sure to get the most nutrition for your money and your body. The more colors on the plate, the wider the variety of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants in the food. Eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day.
- Choose more whole grains for the complex carbohydrates the body needs. For example, brown rice or barley, whole-grain breads and oatmeal are all great choices. Whole grains provide fiber, which is beneficial for the digestive tract and keeps people from feeling hungry longer. Choose proteins with healthy fats. Almonds, walnuts, salmon, tuna, and soy foods such as tofu and soymilk have healthy fats, which are important for heart health. Reduce consumption of saturated fats and hydrogenated vegetable oils.
- Drink fewer soft drinks and products sweetened with high fructose corn syrup, which is really added sugar. Drink water instead.
- Make moderation the goal and consciously decide how much and how often to eat. Healthy eating doesn't mean feeling deprived or guilty. Look at the big picture - it's what is eaten over several days, not just one day or one meal, that's really important to optimal health.

National Nutrition Month promotes healthful eating by providing practical nutrition guidance. For more information and recipes, visit the American Dietetic Association at [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org) and Tri-County Health Department at [www.tchd.org](http://www.tchd.org).

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