Welcome to Warren County Visions!

Welcome to the Fall 2008 edition of County Visions, Warren County’s quarterly newsletter from the Family & Community Health Sciences department of Rutgers Cooperative Extension. Enjoy the tips and recipes inside and be sure to contact us if you have any questions or ideas for future newsletters at FCHS@co.warren.nj.us. And check out our website http://warren.njaes.rutgers.edu for more nutrition information.

Have a healthy happy fall season!

Sherri Cirignano, MS, RD, LDN
FCHS Educator

Navigating the Maze of Organic Foods

What makes a food organic?
Why do organic foods cost so much?
Are non-organic foods safe to eat?

Thursday, November 6, 2008
4:00 pm
Fee: $5.00

For more information or to register call 908-475-6504 or send an e-mail to FCHS@co.warren.nj.us

Need a Speaker?

We can provide a speaker for organizations, schools, or work site groups on the following topics:

The ‘Functional Foods for Life’ Educational Program Series
Nutrition, Physical Activity and Cancer Prevention
Navigating the Maze of Organic Foods
Food Safety at a Glance
Building Healthy Kids

........And many, many more........

Contact us @ 908/475.6504 to schedule your group program today!

Take the Walk New Jersey Point-to-Point Challenge

Walk New Jersey Point-to-Point Challenge is a program designed to encourage youth and adults to virtually walk across New Jersey, from Cape May Point to High Point. The program can be initiated in the classroom, by a group of friends, or individually through this web site. You can track your progress through several virtual walks across scenic New Jersey. Log onto http://familyhealth.rutgers.edu/ to get started today!

What’s Inside?

- Eating Together ~ Eating Well. Is it a priority in your home? Despite all of the possible conflicts, eating meals together is more than worth the effort! Read more to find out how to make it happen in your home.
- Try these delicious recipes using autumn vegetables from our recent program Bringing Vegetables to the Table: A Celebration of the Harvest.
- It’s back to school time! Check out the ABC’s of packing nutritious lunches.
**Whipped Sweet Potatoes with Apples**

3 ½ pounds sweet potatoes, about 6 medium
1 Tbsp. canola oil
2 Tbsp. pure, dark maple syrup, or to taste
Salt and freshly ground pepper
2 tsp. unsalted butter or margarine
1 Golden Delicious apple
Non-stick cooking spray
Nutmeg for garnish

Peel and cut the sweet potatoes into 2-inch cubes. Steam them in a steamer basket, or in a pot with ¼ cup of water, cover and steam for 10-15 minutes or until the cubes are tender. (You can also steam them in the microwave.)

Place the sweet potatoes in a large bowl.

Add the canola oil and maple syrup to the hot sweet potatoes and mash with a fork or a masher until smooth. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Spray a 9-inch square baking pan with cooking spray. Spread the sweet potatoes into the prepared dish, making an even layer.

Melt the 2 teaspoons of butter in the microwave. Peel, halve and core the apple. Place each half, cut-side down, on a cutting board and cut it crosswise into thin slices. Arrange the slices in overlapping rows to cover the sweet potatoes. Brush the apples lightly with the melted butter.

Bake uncovered at 400º F until the sweet potatoes are heated through and the apple slices have softened, about 25 to 30 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature with nutmeg sprinkled on top.

**Autumn Roasted Vegetables**

3 carrots, unpeeled, cut into 1-inch pieces
9 small white button mushrooms
2 cups Brussels sprouts (cut in halves if large) or ½ pound
1 medium sweet potato, peeled and cut into 10-inch pieces
1 Tbsp. olive oil
1 ½ cups fat free reduced sodium chicken or vegetable broth
¼ tsp. dried thyme
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
2 Tbsp. finely chopped pecans for garnish

Preheat oven to 400º F.

Toss vegetables with oil, thyme, salt and pepper. Place vegetables in roasting pan. Pour stock into pan. Roast 45 minutes, stirring and turning every 10 to 15 minutes.

When nearly tender, raise oven heat to 425º F and continue roasting 10 to 15 minutes more or until vegetables are browned and tender.

Remove from oven and drain off any excess liquid. Serve hot, garnished with pecans.

**Source:** AICR (American Institute for Cancer Research)
Eating Together ~ Eating Well: Making it a Priority

Eating Together. Why is it important?

For many reasons, today’s families are stretched for time and find it difficult to make eating together a priority. Often, after a long workday, parents or guardians may be too tired to prepare a meal. Others have conflicting schedules with meetings and extra curricular activities, and still others are unsure of how to prepare a meal.

Despite all of the possible conflicts, eating meals together is more than worth the effort! Recent studies have shown that the children of families who eat together
• Eat more healthful foods.
• Are less likely to be overweight
• Do better in school
• And are less likely to engage in risky behaviors

More than a decade of research by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University has consistently found that the more often kids eat dinner with their families, the less likely they are to smoke, drink alcohol, or use drugs.

Other Benefits

Mealtime also provides important opportunities for communication. Conversation around the lunch, dinner or even breakfast table can be beneficial in many ways. Studies have shown that it can help to increase a child’s vocabulary, leading to improved reading. And better readers have been shown to do better in school. Positive dialogue can also help to strengthen the family unit by providing a time for sharing. This reinforces a sense of belonging and togetherness that is important in a child’s development.

Additionally, mealtime creates opportunities for children to learn social skills and table manners. When the adults in the home take these opportunities to set good examples, they teach children important life skills, such as taking turns and being good listeners, that will be beneficial throughout a child’s life.

Eating Together, Eating Well

Children learn how and what to eat by watching others. At meal time, parents and others can model healthy eating. When families eat together, families eat better. Family meals have been shown to promote healthful food choices.

For example, several studies show that eating together promotes regular eating habits in children, and promotes a healthy weight in young children. A large national study indicated that 4 – 9 year old children were less likely to be overweight when they ate regular family meals. Further studies are needed to determine if other factors may have contributed to these results, but with obesity in children continuing to rise, eating together is a great way to work towards a solution to this problem.
The frequency of eating meals together is also associated with an increased intake of fruits, vegetables, grains, and calcium-rich foods and a decreased intake of soft drinks in children. This is especially true in the teenagers who were studied. Although at this age, teens are starting to eat more meals away from home, studies show that they are still eating more than one half of their meals at home. And 84% of teens surveyed said that they would rather eat dinner with their family than eat alone.

**Tips to Make it Happen**

The benefits of eating together are impressive! The key to making it happen is to not allow the realities of daily life overshadow its importance by making family meals a priority, setting aside a small amount of time each week for planning them, including all family members in this cooperative effort and assuring that it is an enjoyable experience for all.

**Prioritize**

To make eating together work in any family, it has to be a priority for everyone. Some coordination of schedules, compromises, and even sacrifices may need to be made to make it happen. If the family is scattered at dinner time, try to eat breakfast together instead. If everyone can’t get home for a certain time frame, try gathering at a park for a picnic, planning a tailgate meal before an activity, or meeting at a restaurant. Be flexible, but once the plan is made, try to stick to it.

**Plan**

Having a plan for mealtimes will make everything easier. It will help to

- Know everyone’s schedule
- Write down a menu
- Keep foods on hand that can be easily prepared
- Shop ahead of time

Keep it simple! Choose menus that are easy to prepare so that the focus remains on the family sharing time together. The menu doesn’t have to include a home cooked meal. For example, on a busy night the menu could be as quick as turkey sandwiches from the deli with a fresh tossed salad, a piece of fruit and low-fat milk to drink. Or, try “breakfast” for dinner. Prepare pancakes, french toast or waffles topped with your favorite fresh fruits. Use your imagination and be creative with the meal plan and preparation. Remember, being together is what counts!

**QUICK NUTRITIOUS DINNER IDEAS**

- Baked fish and vegetable packets
- Frittata with a side salad
- Salmon burger with coleslaw
- Quick chili topped with plain yogurt and low fat cheese
- Chicken stir-fry over quick cooking brown rice
- Baked potato topped with low fat cheese, steamed broccoli and other favorite toppings
- Pasta tossed with roasted vegetables and parmesan cheese
- Rotisserie chicken with micro waved sweet potatoes and applesauce

**Cooperate**

It is important to make eating together a cooperative effort to take the pressure off of the same family member day after day. The whole family needs to be involved in getting the meal on the table. This will also enhance family togetherness, promote a sense of the importance of each family member and provide great opportunities to teach about nutrition, meal planning and cooking. Everyone can be involved from planning, to prep, to clean up. This is the time to delegate! Dependent on age and experience, children can help with everything from washing vegetables to putting the main dish in the oven, and even little ones can help set the table.

**Enjoy!**

Finally, enjoy this special time with your family. Limit interruptions during the meal by turning off the TV and silencing phones, letting callers leave a message. Keep the atmosphere positive and pleasant, encouraging opportunities for all members to share stories of the day. Avoid negative issues that may promote a tense atmosphere, including conflicts about food. Maintaining a relaxed approach to each mealtime eaten together will go a long way in making it a family tradition that everyone will look forward to.
The ABC’s of School Lunches

It’s back to school time and your first lesson is to review the ABC’s of packing nutritious lunches! Try to provide lunches that put nutrition first for your children everyday to help keep their energy levels up and their attention at its peak.

Put a punch in your kids’ lunch with...

Assortments of high fiber choices from whole grain breads, low fat popcorn and dried fruit. These high fiber choices are from whole plant foods, providing a wide variety of vitamins and minerals and supplying an ongoing feeling of fullness that will continue until the last school bell rings.

Balanced choices from each of the food groups. For example, sneak in veggies by adding shredded cabbage, pepper slices or dark green leafy lettuce to sandwiches for added crunch and a nutritious bonus. Include calcium-rich dairy products with part-skim string cheese, yogurt or cottage cheese and try new choices from the “meat” group with bean spreads such as hummus for dipping pretzel or carrot sticks.

Colorful selections from a variety of fruits and vegetables. Try the readily available tropical fruits such as papaya, kiwi and mango for a fun change or, combine several seasonal fruits or vegetables together. Mix chopped pears, apples and dried cranberries or sliced roasted red and yellow beets in low fat vinaigrette to make a “Rainbow Salad.”

After following the ABC’s of school lunches, you are on your way to preparing lunches that are nutritious and delicious. Make sure they are a hit by including your eager student in the lunch choices! Letting kids help choose what will be going into their lunch box is a great opportunity to teach them about good nutrition and to guide them towards always making nutritional choices that follow the ABC’s!