

FARM: Achieving the best of you in 2017

By MARY WELCH-BEZEMEK, Special to this Newspaper | Posted: Thursday, January 5, 2017 12:10 am

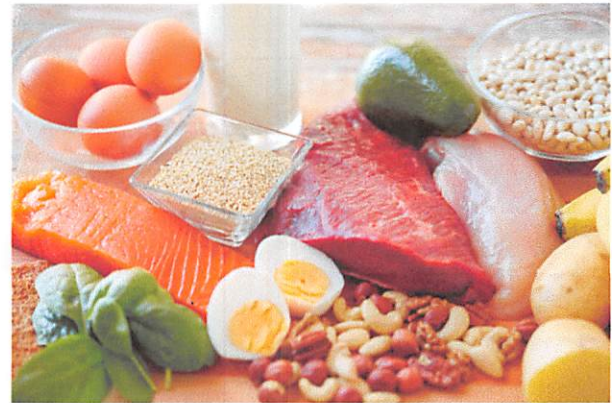
With the new year upon us and resolutions being made, this is a great time to remind ourselves of the importance of a healthy, balanced diet. I am frequently asked: “What is a Healthy Diet?” This sounds like a complex question but is really much easier to achieve than you may think. A healthy diet is any diet that provides balanced nutrition. The main purpose of your diet is to provide your body with the nutrients it needs for optimal function. Eating a variety of foods in a moderate amount (portion sizes) is the way to go.

With millions of foods available to us in our local grocery stores, food bank and local farmers’ markets, an unlimited number of combinations can make almost any diet a healthy one. Without a balanced diet, consisting of a variety of foods, we may be missing a key nutrient which manifests as a food craving. Without knowing what key nutrient is deficient in your diet, you may find yourself scrambling to fill that void. This, in turn, can lead to unhealthy consequences.

Some examples of these consequences include: 1. Too many calories lead to weight gain. 2. Too much fat increases your risk for heart disease. 3. Too much sodium can increase blood pressure, which increases your risk for stroke. Are you overeating because you’re not getting the balanced nutrition you need for a healthy lifestyle?

According to the 2016 USDA Dietary Guidelines, poor diet and physical inactivity are the most important factors contributing to an epidemic of overweight and obesity affecting men, women and children in all segments of our society.” To improve our diet, we need to Build Healthy Eating Patterns.

We can start by eating a variety of foods with 1. An emphasis on fresh fruits and vegetables (5-6 servings per day), 2. Add more whole grains (whole wheat/grain bread/pastas, brown rice, etc.) to your diet, 3. Focus on low-fat protein (fish, chicken, lean beef) including vegetable proteins such as beans/lentils, nuts and soy protein, and 4. Reduce cholesterol, fat, saturated fat, sugars and sodium. Partake in smaller portions when eating out by ordering a smaller portion, sharing your



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meal, or taking some home. These recommendations will help you achieve a balanced, healthy diet.

To avoid physical inactivity, we need to get moving! Too many people are simply inactive and spend too many hours doing sedentary activities. USDA recommends 30 minutes of moderate exercise a day or 2.5 hours per week minimum. This can be achieved through walking, biking, running, swimming, going to the gym, dancing, cleaning the house, etc. For those of us that sit at a desk for eight hours, take frequent five-minute exercise breaks by stretching, walking around the building, running in place, etc. This will also increase brain function. Remember, calories in (eaten) should equal calories out (activity/exercise) so, if you eat 1500 calories, you need to work off 1500 calories.

Improving your diet and physical activity patterns by focusing on consuming fewer calories and making informed food choices will help you maintain a healthy weight, reduce your risk of chronic diseases and promote an overall healthy lifestyle. So, when making your New Year's resolutions for 2017, be sure to take care of you to live a long and healthy life!