

Eating healthy, with color

These days, as health messages (often conflicting) abound, it is sometimes difficult to understand how to follow a healthy diet. That's why we're excited that the theme of this year's National Nutrition Month is a simple message that's easy to follow: "Eat Right with Color."

National Nutrition Month, initiated in March 1973 by the American Dietetic Association as a week-long event, "National Nutrition Week," became a month-long observance in 1980 in response to growing public interest in nutrition. The mission of the ADA "is to promote optimal nutrition and well being for all people by advocating for its members."

Since the beginning, an annual theme has been chosen. The theme for 2011 is "Eat Right with Color." This theme encourages us to pack more nutrition into our diets by adding colorful foods to our meals. Research has shown that foods with heavy pigmentation carry phytonutrients which promote health. By taking the extra step of adding a colorful pepper to a simple salad or tossing some berries on top of your morning cereal, incorporating colorful foods into your routine will become a habit.

Unfortunately, some of our neighbors struggle just to put any food on their plate, let alone something colorful and nutritious. Right now, one in six Americans struggles with hunger. Though we cannot tell who is hungry from the clothes people wear, the jobs they work, or the color of their skin, an apple a day is out of reach for more than 50 million Americans.

Approximately 14.7 percent of American households lack access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life. Here locally, the Food Bank and our partners serve over 20,000 residents in our community each month who are unable to afford enough food to feed their families.

Those at risk of hunger often cannot afford preventative and follow-up healthcare services. For this vulnerable population, access to nutritious foods is vital in maintaining good health. Studies show that growing children need a balance of vitamins and minerals for cognitive and behavioral development.

In response to this need, we provide nutritional resources to our clients. Through our Moveable Market Program, we supply access to fresh produce and educational information to low-income families in Yolo County. Every month, a new vegetable is featured in an information-dense newsletter that is provided to each person or family at one of the established sites. In the newsletter, the highlighted veggie is broken down by tips and techniques, health benefits, and is the star of several recipes.

Since spring of last year, the Food Bank has offered cooking classes to that are structured around nutrient-rich foods. The goal is to provide further information to attendees about preparing healthy and inexpensive meals with ingredients they may or may not be acquainted with. Through these efforts, we hope to ensure that everyone in Yolo County joins in celebrating National Nutrition Month by "Eating Right with Color."

For more tips and information about the Food Bank, visit www.foodbankyc.org, or on National Nutrition Month, visit www.eatright.org/NNM/.

— Shawn Kramer is the community relations coordinator at the Food Bank of Yolo County

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