

Eat Healthy, Stay Active This Winter

Submitted by Franny Eastwood, Family & Consumer Science Agent

When the sun starts to go down earlier each day, some of us find ourselves getting into a bit of a winter slump; in fact, some individuals can even be affected by Seasonal Affective Disorder, which may cause symptoms of depression, loss of energy, and mood and appetite changes. Fortunately, there are some foods and physical activities that can help us enjoy these winter months, and help keep us out of winter's hibernation mode.

The first way to help is by eating fruits and vegetables. The amount of fruits and vegetables we should eat depends on our daily caloric intake, which, in turn, is determined by our age, gender, and our level of physical activity. Generally, those who are age 14 and older and eating a standard 2,000 calorie diet should consume 2 cups of fruits and 2½ cups of vegetables a day.

The fruits and vegetables we should be sure to include in our diets in the winter are deep orange vegetables (e.g., winter squash, carrots and sweet potatoes), cruciferous vegetables (e.g, cauliflower, broccoli), and citrus fruits. Eating the above fruits and vegetables which are high in vitamin C is important because vitamin C:

- Helps produce the protein collagen
- Keeps blood vessels and capillaries firm
- Aids the absorption of Iron and Folate from plant-based foods
- Promotes mouth and gum health
- Helps cuts to heal
- Boosts immunity while protecting from infection

Along with Vitamin C, the citrus fruits and deep orange vegetables also contain lots of Vitamin A, both of which play an important role as antioxidants in the body to combat harmful free radicals. For reference: harmful free radicals occur in the body during metabolism, especially when we expose ourselves to an unhealthy diet or body pollutants such as tobacco and alcohol; and if destructive free radicals react with the oxygen in our bodies, they can cause damage such as skin wrinkles, and diseases such as cancer. The previously mentioned vegetables are very versatile cooking ingredients; for example they can be used to make doughs, and in place of grains like rice and pasta. Try to find more ways to incorporate and experiment in the kitchen with these nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables into your winter diet.

Other nutrients of interest to consume in the winter are Calcium and Vitamin D, which aid in bone health, and Omega-3 fatty acids, which reduce the risk of stroke, heart attack, and inflammatory diseases. The aforementioned nutrients are vital to our health, over the winter months when many of us tend to be less physically active and we are not exposed to ample sunlight. Calcium, Vitamin D and Omega-3

fatty acids can be incorporated into our diet by consuming commonly available fish (e.g., salmon, tuna, herring, mackerel, trout, and sardines) and specific plant-based materials, including:

- Flax seeds
- Chia seeds
- Walnuts
- Brussel sprouts
- Broccoli
- Cauliflower
- Spinach
- Other fortified products.
- Calcium and Vitamin D can also be consumed by eating dairy products.

To help burn calories and stay physically active during the colder months of the year, think of ways to adapt favorite outdoor activities to indoor spaces; for example, those who love to walk for exercise should find a large, public indoor space—such as a shopping mall or recreation center—to continue their routine, Exercise videos on disc or YouTube are also widely available. Even simpler means of increasing daily indoor activity can be found in choosing stairs over automated options, or tackling household chores, such as dusting, sweeping, and vacuuming. Although winter can be a challenging time for us all, eating healthy and staying busy with activities you enjoy can keep you feeling good and help ward off the winter blues.

Source: Penn State Extension, Stacy Reed, MS. For more information on nutrition, food safety, health, or family and child development contact the Marais des Cygnes Extension District Paola (913-294-4306) or Mound City (913-795-2829) offices, or write to fmeastwo@ksu.edu or check out our website: www.maraisdescyignes.k-state.edu