



Prioritizing Wellness in Your Next Season



Definitions of health and wellness are personal, and differ based on stages of life, health concerns, injuries and levels of stress. Your transition affords you the time and opportunity to make proactive choices that support whole health like scheduling regular doctor visits, eating healthy, staying active, getting enough sleep and managing stress. Many of us, however, gain weight as we get older, and too many Americans don't put enough emphasis on proper nutrition and taking care of their bodies--which can lead to health problems that can threaten a joyful next season. Whether you prefer the garden, the golf course or the Grand Canyon, maintaining a healthy lifestyle will ensure you can fully enjoy all the activities or service you have planned. Treating food as fuel for the body, planning ahead and cooking at home with loved ones are among the common threads cited as being instrumental in making healthy choices.

Why Cook?

Heart disease has been the #1 cause of death in the U.S. for almost 100 years, and a poor diet is usually at the root

of those problems. People diagnosed with diabetes, one of the most common diseases in 45- to 64-year olds, pay an average of 2.3 times more in medical expenses than adults without it, according to the [American Diabetes Association](#). A recent [study](#) from Johns Hopkins suggests that people who cook at home frequently eat healthier and consume fewer calories than those who cook less and eat out regularly. Cooking is a fun and simple sensory activity, a skill to wow your loved ones and friends with and a path to increase your knowledge of what goes into your food. The kitchen is a safe place to fail forward, as cooking is a skill that you can continuously improve. In the process, it can be empowering to experiment with simple or more complex flavor profiles – and to learn to use vinegar, citrus, herbs and spice instead of salt, oil and butter to achieve the right balance of taste and health. Plus, as you gain more confidence in your cooking through practice, you will find it easier to make conscious health decisions and to take better care of yourself and your loved ones.

For families, cooking at home translates into time to both prepare and create meals together; an enjoyable experience to be shared with loved ones.

Cooking with your spouse and/or grandchildren can be a daily ritual that allows for quality bonding time, while

also carrying out a task that needs to be completed. Furthermore, according to a [Cornell article](#) in their Parenting in Context series, children who participate in family mealtime are 12% less likely to be overweight and more likely to eat healthy foods, succeed academically and have improved mental health.

The 4 P's

Many of us have tried to eat healthy or cut back on certain foods throughout our lives, and it can be difficult to know where to begin. The ability to make healthy choices starts by learning about the foods we eat, how they affect our bodies and how to eat them in the proper proportions. [Common Threads](#), a non-profit organization that teaches nutrition education and basic cooking techniques to children and families across the country, has a few simple principles to use with confidence to keep your nutrition well-tuned in retirement. Common Threads students, families and teachers start with these basics as they learn to navigate mealtimes: 1. Portion Size, 2. Preparation Style, 3. Paint Your Plate with Color, and 4. Participation. Food is fuel and the table can be the gathering place that brings families together.

- **Portion Size:** Remember that your stomach is only as big as your fist. Be sure to check the serving size on the nutrition label when planning meals to make every bite count.

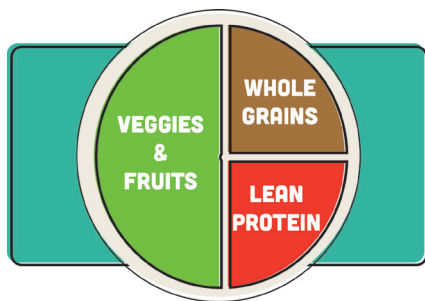
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- **Preparation Style:** Stick to healthy methods of cooking food like baking, broiling, sautéing, steaming, grilling and roasting rather than relying on fried food or processed items.
- **Paint Your Plate with Color:** Aim to eat 3-4 differently colored vegetables and fruits in each meal to get a variety of nutrients. Start with leafy greens, as they are the mostly densely packed with beneficial nutrients.
- **Participation:** Get your family involved, especially your grandkids! When children are involved in preparing food, they are more likely to eat and enjoy it. The more they are continually involved that meal preparation process, the more they develop healthy grocery shopping, cooking and mealtime habits that they will be more inclined to keep throughout their lives.

Healthy Grocery Shopping

Achieving a balanced diet continues at the grocery store with smart shopping. But even if you know what products you're looking for, nutrition labels can be tricky. Food brands often use words like "natural," "fresh," and "real" on their packaging and in TV commercials to convince consumers that their products are healthy, when in fact, there is no regulation on the use of these words at all, which can deceive people about the health contents of the foods they eat.

Many of us are familiar with the old food pyramid as the guide on how to divide our diet between food groups, but Common Threads encourages a diet even more concentrated on fruits, vegetables,



whole grains and lean proteins. You can see in the Chef's Plate that fruits and veggies account for half of a balanced diet, with whole grains and lean proteins each taking up a remaining quarter.

When picking out veggies to buy, look for fresh, in-season vegetables. Fresh vegetables are less likely than canned or frozen ones to have added preservatives and sweeteners that contain potentially harmful chemicals. If you are buying canned or frozen vegetables, make sure the label says "low sodium" or "no salt added" and be wary of other added fats or liquids. Fresh, in-season veggies will not only be inexpensive, but also delicious! Roasting veggies brings out their natural sweetness without having to add any sugar.

There are also important distinctions to make between whole grains and refined grains, as well as lean protein versus fatty

protein. Whole grains such as brown rice, whole wheat bread and pasta, oatmeal and popcorn contain more nutritional value than refined or enriched grains such as white rice, white bread and many cracker brands. The

process of refining or enriching grains removes many of the nutrients in the grain like fiber and potassium.

When it comes to protein, choose lean protein like beans, fish or skinless chicken compared to the fatty proteins we more frequently consume like fast food burgers, bacon and fried chicken. While both forms of meat provide iron and other essential vitamins and minerals, the fatty meats are usually loaded with salt, oil and saturated fat, which are associated with weight gain

and increased risk of heart disease.

Cooking With Kids

Cooking and eating healthy is challenging, especially on your own. Beyond making yourself healthy as an individual, you can be a role model and spread this wealth of nutrition knowledge to your family and community, while sharing meaningful experiences with your children and grandchildren.

Getting your grandkids involved in the kitchen is not only a fun way to spend quality time with your family, but it also teaches them several important lessons. Kids who cook learn math and science skills by measuring and portioning out ingredients, and can also the value of planning ahead, time management and budgeting when they are put in charge of preparing a family meal.

The more time kids spend in the kitchen, the more curiosity they develop about food, the more confident they feel in their cooking and skills and their contributions to the family, and the more empowered they feel to express their creativity through different combinations of food.

Plus, cooking is a road into exploring cultural identity. Many countries have unique methods of preparing signature dishes, exotic ingredients and spice blends that make up their national cuisine. Share your culinary heritage with your family and create memories and traditions that you can pass on through generations of your family.

To get started, here are sample recipes you can try from the [Common Threads Cooking for Life Handbook](#), an online resource filled with healthy, kid-friendly nutrition tips to share with your family: