

## **IN OUR FIELD: Tips on eating a healthy, balanced diet**

**By MARY WELCH-BEZEMEK Special to this Newspaper | Posted: Thursday, August 21, 2014 12:15 am**

I often have clients/co-workers/neighbors/friends ask, “What is a healthy diet?”

I like to tell them: 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 is the way to go.

With millions of foods available to us in our local grocery stores/food bank and from 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.

For example: 1. Too many calories leads to weight gain. 2. Too much fat increases risk for heart disease. 3. Too much sodium can increase blood pressure. Are you overeating because you are not getting the balanced nutrition you need?

The “Dietary Guidelines for Americans,” published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, provides a nutritional framework for a healthy diet which consists of: 1. Balanced fat, protein and carbohydrates. 2. Sufficient fiber, omega-3 fatty acids (such as fish and fish oil), vitamins and minerals. 3. Reduced cholesterol, fat, saturated fat and sodium. 4. Calories in should equal calories out (for example: If you eat 1,500 calories, you need to work off 1,500 calories). This can be achieved through house work, playing with your children, going on family walks, biking as a family and swimming. Eating and physical activity patterns that are focused on consuming fewer calories, making informed food choices and being physically active can help can help people attain and maintain a healthy weight, reduce their risk of chronic disease and promote overall health.



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**MARY WELCH-BEZEMEK**

Imperial Valley's local food sources exemplify these "guidelines" by offering selections that accommodate food preferences, cultural traditions and customs of the many and diverse groups who live in the area.

When your diet provides balanced nutrition, weight control is easier. You also feel more energized and happy in daily life, and significantly reduce your risk for type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

Americans currently consume too much sodium and too many calories from solid fats, added sugars and refined grains. These replace nutrient-dense foods and beverages and make it difficult for people to achieve a balanced nutritional diet. A healthy-eating pattern emphasizes nutrient-dense foods and beverages such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat milk, seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, beans and peas, and nuts and seeds.

A balanced nutritional diet, consisting of a variety of foods, will not only help our community fight obesity but also reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, osteoporosis and some types of cancer.

So remember, a wide variety of foods consisting of bright colors is not only appealing to our eyes but also to our stomachs.

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