

Eating healthy can be a challenge if you live alone. Part of the pleasure of eating is to have someone to share the meal, compliment the cook, or help with the preparation. I really appreciate help with the clean up after the meal. Here are a few tips that may make meal time a pleasure.

Share your meals. Make a date with people you enjoy - grandchildren, nieces, nephews, friends, and neighbors. Share a meal on a rotating bases with one of these loved ones.

Start a supper club. Years ago one of our guest speakers for the Lunch and Learn program was Margo Wilder. She told us about preparing nutritious meals for several people in her neighborhood. I really wanted to be in this group. These people enjoyed socializing, as well as the nutritious meal. The neighbors also were losing weight because of the right portion sizes and nutritious food. You have more control of what goes into your meals when you prepare them. If there are several people in your neighborhood in good health that likes to cook, this concept might work for you. Each person might take one day a week or month.

Pot Luck meal. If you don't want to cook the complete meal have friends and/or a neighbor, bring one dish to complete the whole meal. This would be a fun way to try out new dishes.

Participate in community actives, volunteer, or take a class. By joining in, it gives you an opportunity to meet new people, which can develop into a friendship, therefore a dinning partner.

Go to a community center to share a meal. Have your friends meet you at Lincoln Council on Aging Center at 1000 Saratoga. Meals only cost a dollar. It provides companionship, as well as a nutritious meal. If you're worried about transportation, they can help.

There are challenges that come from aging which can prevent you from eating; dentures, problems with chewing, loss of appetite, and dry mouth.

If you have difficulty chewing, check with your dentist to make sure dentures are properly fitted. When chewing is difficult try drinking smoothies made with fresh fruit and milk. Eat steamed vegetables and soft foods such as yogurt and applesauce.

If you have a loss of appetite check with your doctor to see if it could be due to medication you are taking. Try different spices to boost your appetite.

If you have a dry mouth drink 8 to 10 glasses of water a day. Moisten your food with sauces and salsas. Take a drink of water after each bite of food. Check with your doctor about artificial saliva products.

Planning is the key to good nutrition. Healthy eating is not about a strict eating plan. It is all about balancing your meals to include fruits, vegetables, calcium, grains, and protein.

Summer it a great time to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. If you are not gardening, check out Ruston's Farmers on Saturday for fresh vegetables. The market is located between Railroad Avenue and Monroe Street (the parking lot in front of Ruston Dry Cleaners)

Think of a rainbow of color when selecting vegetables. Choose antioxidant rich dark leafy greens, such as kale, spinach, and broccoli. Select yellow and orange vegetables such as squash, carrots, and yams. Try for 2 to 2 ½ cups.

Fruit is another essential food for fiber and vitamins; aim for 1 ½ to 2 servings each day. Berries and melons are plentiful at this time.

Calcium helps maintain bone healthy. Seniors need 1,200 mg of calcium a day. This can be accomplished by eating dairy products milk, yogurt, or cheese. Non- dairy sources include tofu, almonds, kale, and broccoli.

Make half of your grains whole grains. They have more nutrients and more fiber than processed white flour. Seniors need 6 to 7 ounces of grains each day.

Protein is essential for building and repairing body tissue. Seniors need about 0.5 grams per pound of body weight of protein daily. Vary your protein source with more fish, beans, peas, nuts, eggs, milk, cheese, and seeds.

Watch your portions. Think smaller portions. As we age we need to reduce our calories by 2 % with each decade.

Don't forget the water. Seniors are prone to dehydration because sense of thirst is dulled with age. Fill a glass of water and sip and refill throughout the day. Post a note on the refrigerator reminding you to drink water every hour to avoid urinary tract infections, constipation and even confusion.

My Plate is a guide for eating healthy. The plate is divided into four parts of fruit, vegetables, protein, and grains, with a glass for dairy. Check out MyPlate.gov for more important information on healthy eating.

For a quick and easy meal, use left overs such as roasted chicken, vegetables, and salsa wrapped in a whole wheat tortilla. Use cut up fruit, grapes, bananas, strawberries with a little granola and honey on top for breakfast or a sweet snack. Eating nutritious meals don't need to take a lot of time.

For more information on nutrition or healthy tips on eating, call the LSU AgCenter in Lincoln Parish.