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Choosing Healthy Foods to Celebrate National Heart Month

February is National Heart Month and is a good time to focus on making small changes that can have a big impact on your health. One tool you can use is called MyPlate, which can help you pick the healthiest options from each of the five food groups. When you eat foods from all the food groups you can get healthy sources of proteins, carbohydrates, and fats, along with important vitamins and minerals.

When choosing your fruits and vegetables you want to aim for a variety of colors. While shopping for fruits and vegetables at the grocery store, you can choose between fresh, canned, or frozen options. When selecting canned fruits, pick those that are packed in water or juice. When selecting canned vegetables, choose low sodium or sodium-free options.

While most people don't have any trouble eating enough foods from the grains group, at least half of the grain products we eat should be whole grain. Some whole grain options are whole wheat bread, oats, brown rice, or popcorn. To make sure you are buying whole grain products, look for the yellow "whole grain stamp" on a product.

When it comes to eating Dairy foods, we want to aim for low-fat or fat-free options. Drinking milk is an easy way to get enough dairy throughout the day. You can also choose low-fat yogurts and cheeses. Low-fat dairy options have less fat, but the same amount of protein, vitamins, and minerals that full-fat dairy products have.

Chicken, beef, pork, fish, seafood, and eggs all belong to the Protein group. But did you know that plant foods like beans, lentils, soy products like tofu, and nuts can all be good protein sources? We typically eat enough protein every day, but just like the dairy group, we want to aim for sources of protein that are lower in fat. Grilling and baking are healthy ways to cook your protein foods. Adding more fish and plant-based protein to your diet can give you the protein you need every day without certain fats that can have a negative effect on your health.

Focus on making one or two simple changes at a time to your diet. Incorporating simple changes can have a big impact on your health and wellbeing. This makes it easier to start making changes to improve your health and makes it easier to stick with when life gets busy.

For more nutrition information, you can visit MyPlate.gov and make every bite count! More information on the OSU Extension SNAP-Ed Program can be found at fcs.osu.edu/programs/nutrition/snap-ed.