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How to Make the Shift to Healthier Choices

When it comes to eating healthier, making small shifts over time can have a positive impact on our overall health. Making changes to our eating patterns can be overwhelming and make it hard to decide where to start. I like to try and think that every time you make a food choice during your day is an opportunity to move toward a healthy eating pattern.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans made a shift towards foods that contain a high amount of vitamins and minerals, but are relatively low in calories. These are called nutrient dense foods. For most people that means finding new ways to include more vegetables, fruits, lean proteins, and reducing the number of foods we consume that contain added sugars and are high in fats.

We can use MyPlate and the five food groups to think of ideas to make small changes. When looking at our fruit and vegetable food groups, try picking out a new fruit or vegetable each week to try as a family, or you can make it a game. Think about adding an additional fruit or vegetable to one meal each day.

When thinking about choosing low fat proteins, try using ground turkey instead of ground beef. When making dishes like chili or taco meat, try reducing the amount of meat and adding beans as part of your protein.

For grains, add one or two whole grains throughout the day, and gradually add different types as you learn what you like to eat. Lightly salted popcorn is a delicious whole grain snack. Instead of using white rice try using brown or wild rice when cooking. Try experimenting with different types of whole grain pastas. In our house we like eating whole grain rotini or penne pasta instead of whole grain angel hair pasta.

When thinking about making changes with dairy foods, experiment by making your own veggie or chip dip using low-fat yogurt or low-fat sour cream instead of full fat sour cream. If you like drinking whole milk, try switching to 2% milk. For a sweet treat, make a fruit smoothie with low-fat plain or vanilla yogurt.

These changes all together may seem unrealistic to add into your daily life. Focus on one or two changes for a week before adding a third change. Remember even small changes can add up to have a positive impact on our overall health.

For more information on the SNAP-ed program visit www.fcs.osu.edu/programs/nutrition/snap-ed. You can also find more nutrition information at the Clermont CAN website at www.ccphohio.org/can/eat-smart/.