

Plan for health during the holidays, in the next year

It's not always so clear-cut – or easy to follow-through – but being healthy and improving one's quality of life can be summed up in three small phrases.

Build a better meal. Boost your physical activity. Balance stress.

“So, the three B's are really important,” said Chelsea Reinberg, a nutrition, food safety and health agent in K-State Research and Extension's Johnson County office. “I frame good health that way because it's easy to remember...but sometimes doing all three is difficult. Doing all three is important and they all affect our health.”

The three B's, Reinberg said, can provide a valuable road map for people heading into holidays or considering New Year's resolutions.

Build a better meal

Reinberg said the USDA provides a visual reminder to help Americans make healthy choices from each of the five food groups. The graphic is called [MyPlate, and can be viewed online](#).

“MyPlate gives us a great image of how all of our meals – breakfast, lunch and dinner – should be built,” Reinberg said. “Half of your plate should be fruits or vegetables; a quarter should be grains – focusing on whole grains – and a quarter should be protein. Then, maybe a side of dairy, for those who consume dairy products.”

Fruits and vegetables contain fiber, which may help to manage weight, prevent constipation, enhance gut health and reduce the risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes, among other benefits.

“The great thing about food and nutrition is that we can be creative,” Reinberg said. “Some people like to eat the same meals...but diversifying our plate is also healthy. As nutritionists, we say, ‘eat the rainbow,’ because each color had different nutrients, antioxidants, phytonutrients, vitamins and minerals.”

Boost your physical activity

“When people think about physical activity, often they think about going to the gym or going out and running a mile or a marathon or whatever it may be,” Reinberg said.

Instead, physical activity may mean a steady 15-20-minute walk, or another activity that reduces sitting time and gets you away from screens or other technology.

“Being more physically active has some immediate benefits; for example, you may feel like your stress is reduced after a short walk. It reduces your blood pressure, at least temporarily,” Reinberg said.

Long-term benefits include a decreased risk of heart disease or diabetes; lower blood pressure; stronger bones and muscles; and better coordination and balance.

“Some studies have shown that no matter how healthy you are in terms of eating, if you sit for a majority of your day, and then you go home and just sit on the couch, that can actually negate some of the other health benefits that you're trying to get by maybe eating an apple in the morning for breakfast.”

Balance stress

Physical activity also helps to reduce stress, but colder weather can limit the opportunity to get outside and move. Reinberg said it's important to acknowledge stress and "have a game plan as we go into the holidays."

"If you know that finances or family dynamics are going to be points of stress, make sure you think about it and prepare a plan so that you know that if you're in certain situations, you will know how to handle them," she said. "Your plan of action should help to assure that stress doesn't get the best of you."

Chronic stress can increase the risk of heart disease, stroke or high blood pressure.

"Keeping stress in is not a good thing," Reinberg said. "People handle stress differently, which I think is important to acknowledge that you and I are going to react differently to stressful situations. But to really make sure that you know what your triggers are and that you know how to resolve those... is very important."

Regarding the three B's, Reinberg said "you don't have to tackle all three at the same time."

"Maybe you start with building a better meal first, and develop a goal for that. Then, once you feel like you're at a good place there, you can move on to setting a goal for boosting your physical activity or balancing your stress, or whatever order works for you."