

National Nutrition Month:

Making informed choices for healthier eating

March is National Nutrition Month, created by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. The campaign focuses attention on the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits. During the month, the Academy encourages everyone to include healthy foods from all food groups through this year's theme: "Get Your Plate in Shape."

Here are some tips from registered dietitians to make it easy to 'get your plate in shape' this National Nutrition Month:

Make half of your plate fruits and vegetables.

- Eat a variety of vegetables, especially dark-green, red and orange varieties, as well as beans and peas.
- When buying canned vegetables, choose "reduced sodium" or "no salt added" whenever possible. Rinsing whole varieties like beans, corn and peas can also reduce sodium levels.

A love affair

When I moved back to Washington two years ago, a friend mentioned Bench Gym as being a terrific place. Not that I doubted it, but it seemed as if it would be one of those snotty little gyms where you go just to show off your new athletic gear and get a trainer that endorses whatever you want to do (or not).



Well, after many frustrated attempts at other places, my friend Arne convinced me that Bench Gym was the place to go, and he arranged a try-out session with Jon. It was love at first sight! The place looks like a very special private club with amazing, funny and very tough trainers.

After three months, my body has already changed a lot and I feel great. Mr. Q is sweetly merciless! Always encouraging me, always knowledgeable of what works for me. Bench Gym is a big family -- and Bench is a love affair! — Deni Vallada

BUZZ:

Did you know that USDA's MyPlate is a great tool to help us remember foods that make up our balanced eating plan? Cook more at home, where you can control what is in your food. And don't forget that exercise and healthy eating are crucial to maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

- Dried and frozen fruits and those canned in water or their own juice are good options when fresh varieties are not available.
- Make sure every meal and snack has at least one fruit or vegetable or both.

Make at least half your grains whole.

- Choose brown rice, barley and oats and other whole grains for your sides and ingredients.
- Switch to 100-percent whole-grain breads, cereals and crackers.

Switch to fat-free or low-fat milk.

- Fat-free and low-fat milk have the same amount of calcium and other essential nutrients as whole milk, but less fat and fewer calories.
- If you are lactose intolerant, try lactose-free milk or a calcium-fortified soy beverage.

Vary your protein choices.

- Eat a variety of foods each week from the protein food group, such as seafood, nuts and beans, as well as lean meat, poultry and eggs.
- Eat more plant-based proteins, such as nuts, beans, whole grains and whole soy foods like tofu and edamame.
- At least twice a week, make fish and seafood the protein on your plate.
- Keep meat and poultry portions lean and limit to three ounces per meal.

Cut back on sodium and empty calories from solid fats and added sugars.

- Drink water instead of sugary drinks such as regular sodas, fruit-flavored drinks and sweetened teas and coffees. Choose 100-percent fruit juice.
- Season foods with spices or herbs instead of salt.
- Use heart-healthy oils such as olive, canola and sunflower oil in place of butter or shortening for cooking.

Visit the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics at www.eatright.org for more info.