

A Healthy Diet Is the Foundation of a Healthy Life

March is National Nutrition Month

In recognition of March as National Nutrition Month, the Department of Public Health reminds residents that eating nutritious foods is one of the keys to protecting their health.

“Eating right does not have to be complicated,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “Simple choices such as adding more fruits and vegetables into your diet and reducing your consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and fried or other high-fat foods can make a real difference.”

Only 15.1 percent of adults in Los Angeles County reported consuming five or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day, according to the 2007 Los Angeles County Health Survey. In addition, 38.8 percent of adults and 43.3 percent of children consume one or more sodas or sugar-sweetened beverages a day.

“Our bodies were not designed to consume lots of sugary and high-fat foods,” said Dr. Fielding. “Our taste buds were not, either. Try incorporating more wholesome foods into your diet: you’ll be surprised at the variety of delicious flavors offered by fresh fruits and vegetables. Once you start enjoying a healthier diet, you will be less reliant on processed foods.”

In addition to being tasty, a healthy eating plan coupled with regular physical activity can reduce your risk of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and other physical ailments. In California in 2006, nearly 60 percent of residents were overweight or obese, increasing their risk for many health conditions related to premature illness, disability and death; including coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some forms of cancer.

National Nutrition Month is sponsored by the American Dietetic Association. Tips from the ADA for building a healthy diet include:

- **Start with the basics.** A healthy eating plan emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat or fat-free dairy and includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans and nuts. A healthy eating plan is also low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt and added sugars.
- **Make calories count** by thinking nutrient-rich rather than “good” or “bad” foods. Most food choices should be packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber and other nutrients — and lower in calories. Be aware of portion sizes. Even low-calorie foods can add up when portions are larger than you need.
- **Focus on variety** by eating a variety of foods from all the food groups. Fruits and vegetables can be fresh, canned or frozen. Look for locally grown produce that’s in season. Vary protein choices with more fish, beans, and peas. Include at least three servings of whole grain cereals, breads, crackers, rice, or pasta every day.
- **Make the most of family mealtime.** Eating meals together provides the opportunity to help children develop a healthy attitude toward food. It also

enables parents to serve as role models, introduce new foods, and establish a regular meal schedule.

- **Balancing physical activity** and a healthful diet is your best recipe for managing weight and promoting overall health and fitness. Set a goal to be physically active at least 30 minutes every day.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises more than 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do, please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>, or follow us on Twitter: LAPublicHealth.