Get Up & Move!

Parent Newsletter Series 1: November

The Importance of Portions
This month your children have learned about the importance of portion sizes. It is not only important to consume the right number of foods from each food group, but it is also important to understand how much of each food one serving equals. Research shows that Americans are eating larger portions, which may contribute to weight gain. The amount of food you and your children need depends on age, gender, and physical activity. You and your children can visit www.MyPyramid.gov for more information about the amount of food youth and adults need from each of the food groups.

Many people believe that the words “portion size” and “serving” are interchangeable, but they are not. A “portion” is how much food a person chooses to eat at one time, and a “serving” is the amount of food listed on a product’s Nutrition Facts label. Sometimes, the portion size and serving size match; sometimes they do not. The serving size listed on the Nutrition Facts label is not a recommended amount of food to eat. It is a quick way of letting you know the calories and nutrients in a certain amount of food.

The portion sizes that you and your children may be used to eating may be equal to two or three standard servings. Learning to recognize standard serving sizes can help you and your children to understand how much you are eating. At first, it may be helpful to measure foods in order to understand what a serving looks like. When you and your children have begun to recognize typical serving sizes, you can use some common household objects to help estimate serving sizes. Below is a list of some commonly eaten foods and the object that best estimates one serving size:

- 3 oz. meat = size of a deck of cards or a bar of soap
- 3 oz. fish = size of a checkbook
- 1 oz. cheese = size of 4 small dice
- 1 medium potato = size of a computer mouse
- 2 Tbsp. peanut butter = size of a ping pong ball
- ½ cup of pasta = size of a tennis ball
- 1 average bagel = size of a hockey puck
- 1 medium apple or orange = the size of a tennis ball
- 1 cup of chopped vegetables or fruit = size of a baseball
  - ¼ cup dried fruit = size of a small handful

*(Note: hands and finger sizes vary from person to person! These are only GUIDES).
For more food portion sizes, you can download the handout “Making Sense of Serving Sizes” from the Illinois 4-H website at www.4-h.uiuc.edu/opps/move. It can be found in the month of November in the Series 1 materials. Here are some additional tips for controlling portion sizes when you and your children are eating at home or out at a restaurant.

- When snacking in front of the TV, put snacks in a bowl or a container to prevent over eating
- When eating at home, serve foods in individual plates instead of putting the serving dishes on the table
- When eating out, share your meal or ask the wait staff to wrap-up half of your meal when it is brought to the table
- Stop eating when you begin to feel full
- Avoid “supersized” meals or drinks
- Replace the candy dish with a fruit bowl
- Store healthier foods in the front of the refrigerator or shelf at eye level and less healthy foods where they are not as easily seen
- Try to avoid eating in front of the TV or while you are busy doing other activities
- Eat slowly so your brain can get the message that your stomach is full
- When cooking large amounts of food, freeze food that you will not serve right away.
- Try to eat meals at regular intervals; skipping meals may cause you to eat larger amounts of food at your next meal