

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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*“Improving Our Summer Eating Habits”*

Well Summer is upon us; along with grilling season, long and busy days, ball games, 4-H events, lake days, and various other extracurricular activities. Moral of the story? We are all busy and sometimes it can be hard to find the time to sit down and share a meal with family, let alone a balanced one. Sometimes it is just easier to grab that bag of chips from the pantry, or that donut off the counter. However, there are some steps we can take to make those healthy eating choices and habits a little easier.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and other organizations have reported that barely 10% of Americans regularly meet the daily recommendation for eight servings of fruits and vegetables. Kansans fall in the middle of that range. Only 10% of residents eat enough fruit daily, and just 8% get enough vegetables. To give you a guideline, the USDA defines a serving as a full cup of raw vegetables or fruit or a half cup of cooked vegetables.

One trick to consuming more fruits and vegetables is to make it easy, convenient and fast to get to. If you can make it a habit, then it will be easier over time. One trick to establishing that habit is to keep a bowl of fresh fruit out so that you can see it when you walk into the kitchen. If you're hungry for a snack, then you are more likely to grab that instead of looking into the cabinet for something a little less nutritious.

You can also make eating fruits and vegetables more fun for the family by creating skewers with fun fruit shapes including watermelon, grapes, blueberries, kiwi, cantaloupe or even grape tomatoes. It might be hard as an adult to make sure we are getting our daily serving in, but as many of you know, kids are always watching us. So, if we make it a point to choose those fruits and veggies first then we are serving as role models for making the healthier choice.

Another option for getting those veggies in the diet is to grill them. Decide on your vegetable selection and mix in some herbs and seasonings to create a delicious side dish. If you end up with extra fruits and vegetables that you have problems getting into a meal, then you can always can or freeze them for later use. Now get out there and enjoy that healthy living!

Information comes from K-State Research and Extension Northwest Area Family and Consumer Science specialist, Ashley Svaty.