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*“Kickstart a Healthier Year”*

As we step into a new year, many of us feel motivated to make positive changes and focus on improving our health. A fresh start can be the perfect opportunity to create new habits, revisit old goals, and commit to routines that support our overall well-being. Whether you’re aiming to eat better, move more, or simply feel healthier on a day-to-day basis, small, intentional steps can make a big difference. Building a balanced lifestyle starts with making mindful choices regarding nutrition and physical activity.

To ensure meals are nutritionally balanced, aim to include three of the five MyPlate food groups at every meal. Fruits and Vegetables should fill half your plate. They are packed with vitamins, minerals, and fiber. They help support immune health, digestion, and disease prevention. Grains, whenever possible, should be whole grains such as whole wheat bread, brown rice, quinoa, or oats. Whole grains contain more fiber and nutrients than refined grains. Protein should come from lean sources, such as chicken, fish, 93% lean ground beef, beans, or lentils. Protein supports muscle repair, immune function, and helps keep you full longer. Dairy products, such as milk, cheese, and yogurt, can help meet your calcium and vitamin D needs, supporting strong bones and teeth.

Alongside a healthy diet, regular physical activity plays a vital role in building and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. To maximize the benefits of exercise, aim to incorporate a mix of aerobic exercise, strength training, stretching, and balance exercises into your routine. Aerobic activities, such as walking, jogging, dancing, or playing tennis, engage large muscle groups. These activities improve stamina while supporting the health of the heart, lungs, and circulatory system. Strength training, which can be done using free weights, resistance bands, or strength-training machines, helps maintain muscle and bone strength, boosts metabolism, and slows the progression of osteoporosis. While often overlooked, stretching is essential for maintaining flexibility and ensuring smooth movement of muscles and joints. It increases blood flow and nutrient delivery to muscles, helping to reduce soreness, tension, and pain. Balance exercises, such as front and side leg raises or toe touches, are especially important to incorporate in workouts as we age, helping to maintain stability and prevent falls. It is recommended that adults get 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity exercise each week. This can be easily broken down into manageable intervals, such as 30 minutes, 5 days a week, or 50 minutes, 3 days a week. Try to incorporate strength training exercises into your routine at least 2 days a week, and remember to stretch after each workout.

Information comes from Kansas State University Publications.