I get excited as winter begins to inch into late spring and early summer, and our choices of locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables become endless! Not only is locally grown in-season produce typically cheaper and more bountiful, it is also the time of year when my nutrition game is at its maximum and overall health is better as well. Since I feel my best in the summer, I think it has at least something to do with my diet quality being 100 times better than in the winter months.

With the opening of the local farmers markets, it is the perfect time to consider hopping on the plant-based foods trend. Fortune’s article “Food Trends in 2018” highlights a new trend of eating a more plant-based diet. This is described as a lifestyle that focuses on eating more plant-based foods, such as fruits, vegetables, beans, lentils, nuts, and seeds, shifting the focus from “meat” as the main dish to plants.

I have heard from others that going “plant-based” is not realistic for their lifestyle. There is a common misconception that this dietary approach requires becoming fully vegetarian or vegan without consuming any animal products at all. Although this is an example of a plant-based diet, it is not the only way to become more plant-based in making food choices. Following the USDA’s MyPlate and eating ¼ of your plate from plant-based foods (vegetables, fruits, and grains) is an example of this approach. Check out www.choosemyplate.gov for more information on MyPlate. Or, try having a “meatless” meal once or twice a week where you focus on using plant-based proteins, like beans, tofu, nuts, and seeds.

As I work to eat more plant-based foods in this summer, I encourage you all to hop on board! Make it a weekly challenge to create a delicious, colorful, meatless meal! Check out the two plant-based recipes in this issue to get you started or to spark some inspiration.
Are You Drinking Enough Water?

By Jackie Amende

As the temperatures start to rise, it is vital to drink plenty of water. No matter what time of year it is, your body loses water through sweating, urinating and breathing, but during warmer and hot weather staying hydrated is crucial.

Being well-hydrated can help you stay focused and provide the much-needed energy a caffeinated beverage can only dream of supplying. The Food and Nutrition Board recommends women consume a total of 2.7 liters (91 ounces) water from all beverages and foods per day, while men need 3.7 liters (125 ounces) per day. Although with high-intensity exercise and prolonged heat exposure, total water needs may be greater.

The general recommendation of drinking eight 8-oz glasses of water per day can help you reach your total water recommendation. Try carrying a water bottle with the measurements marked, so you can track the number of ounces you drink. Challenge yourself to reach at least 64 ounces of plain water per day!

How can you tell if you are well-hydrated? It is as simple as checking the color of your urine. If your urine is yellow, it likely indicates that you need more fluids; a light yellow or clear color usually means you are well-hydrated.

Not only is it important to stay hydrated, drinking water in general has been shown to help with weight maintenance and weight loss. Increasing the amount you drink can help you reach health and wellness goals. Research has shown that people who drink more plain water generally consume fewer total daily calories. This is obvious when considering the amount of sugar and calories that are often in beverages like sodas, energy drinks, and coffee drinks. Research has also shown that hunger and thirst feel very similar and are often misinterpreted. Many times, we reach for a snack because we feel a sensation of hunger, when in fact we are dehydrated and thirsty. Drink a glass of water before eating a snack and then see how you feel.

Try fruit-infused water to help make your hydration efforts tasty and fun! Slice some strawberries and drop in a few mint leaves for Strawberry Mint Water or cube watermelon and add basil for a Watermelon Basil Water.

Source: CDC and Food & Nutrition Board

Because You Asked:

Q. My husband and I use a lot of olive oil. Are canola, corn and other plant oils as healthy?

A. There’s no definitive evidence right now to show that olive oil is superior to other liquid plant oils,” explains Alicia Romano, MS, RD, LDN, Registered Dietitian. “One of the differences between oils is in the types of fatty acids in them. You’ve probably heard a lot about the health benefits of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids; these are polyunsaturated fatty acids.

“Some research suggests that replacing saturated fats in butter and lard with polyunsaturated fats from plant oils is associated with lower risk of cardiovascular disease. Both soybean oil and corn oil are higher in polyunsaturated fats than olive oil. Olive oil—and its mostly monounsaturated fats—is still considered a healthy choice. In fact, there is preliminary evidence that phytochemicals in extra-virgin olive oil may contribute to the reduced cardiovascular risks associated with the Mediterranean diet pattern. Ideally, consume a variety of plant oils, the same way you eat a variety of fruits and vegetables to obtain maximum benefits. But there is an exception: Tropical oils like palm and coconut are high in saturated fats, so oils relatively higher in unsaturated fats are the better choice.”

Source: Adapted from Tufts Health & Nutrition Newsletter, May 2018

Q. I’ve heard that sprouted whole grains have more nutrients than other grains and are more digestible. Is this true?

A. Nicola McKeown, PhD, a scientist in the HNRCA Nutritional Epidemiology Program, explains: “Some studies suggest health benefits associated with eating sprouted grains; however, it is early in the research process and data is limited. There is evidence that sprouting may improve the nutritional profile of grains compared to non-sprouted grains. Some vitamins, such as vitamin C and folate and other B vitamins, have been found to be higher in some sprouted grains; however, it varies by grain and the sprouting process.

“In sprouting, the central germ in the grain kernel produces chemicals that break down starches in the endosperm. Whether this makes the starches easier to digest has not been extensively studied, so we can’t be certain if sprouted grains are more digestible.”

Source: Adapted from Tufts Health & Nutrition Newsletter, May 2018
Veggie Highlight: Asparagus!

HEALTHY TABLE: Load Up on Asparagus for Its Healthy Dose of Folate and Antioxidants

Spring is a great time to reacquaint your family with fresh vegetables and there is no better time to add asparagus to the menu. Aside from taste, there are great nutritional reasons why you’ll want to pick up some asparagus soon.

A mere five spears of asparagus provide almost half the recommended daily amount of vitamin K, which plays a crucial role in blood clotting. People taking anticoagulants or blood thinners such as Coumadin (warfarin) must pay close attention to the amount of vitamin K they consume, as it can alter the effectiveness of the medication.

Asparagus provides a healthy dose of the B vitamin folate. Pregnant women who don’t get enough folate are at risk of having a baby with neural tube defects, including spina bifida. Folate deficiency can also increase the chances of having a premature or low-birth-weight baby.

According to the American Institute of Cancer Research, asparagus also contains glutathione, an antioxidant and potential cancer fighter.

When buying asparagus for the following recipe, look for firm, bright green stalks that stand straight. The tips should be a deep green or purplish color, closed and compact. Partially open or wilted tips are signs of age. Store fresh asparagus in the refrigerator to preserve its tenderness and natural sweetness. For best quality, use within three days of purchase.

Article & Recipe by Darlene Zimmerman, a registered dietitian in Henry Ford Hospital’s Heart & Vascular Institute.

Try These Great Plant-Based Recipes!

STIR-FRIED RICE NOODLES WITH TOFU AND VEGETABLES

INGREDIENTS
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup low-sodium soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 1 14-ounce package firm tofu, cut into 1/2-inch-thick slices
- 1 tablespoon canola oil
- 2 carrots, cut into thin strips
- 1 red bell pepper, thinly sliced
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
- 2 cups bean sprouts
- 4 scallions, thinly sliced
- 1/4 cup roasted peanuts, roughly chopped
- 1/2 cup fresh cilantro (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS
1. Boil the noodles according to the package directions. Drain and return them to the pot.
2. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, whisk together the sugar, soy sauce, and lime juice.
3. Gently press the tofu slices between layers of paper towels to remove excess liquid, then cut into ½-inch pieces.
4. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the carrots, bell pepper, and ginger and cook, stirring, for 2 minutes. Add the tofu and bean sprouts. Cook, stirring, until the vegetables are slightly tender, 3 to 4 minutes.
5. Toss the noodles with half the soy sauce mixture and cook over medium-high heat until heated through, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer to a platter and top with the vegetables and the remaining soy sauce mixture.
6. Sprinkle with the scallions, peanuts, and cilantro, if desired.

Nutrition Information: Serves 4. Per serving: Calories 512; Fat 15g; Sat fat 1g; Cholesterol 0mg; Sodium 529mg; Protein 19g; Carbohydrate 76g; Fiber 5g

Source: https://www.realsimple.com/food-recipes/browse-all-recipes/stir-fried-rice-noodles-tofu-vegetables

KIDNEY BEAN SALAD WITH WALNUTS AND CILANTRO

The great flavor of toasted cumin adds a nice dimension to this easy side dish.

INGREDIENTS
- 2 teaspoons cumin seeds
- 7 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 6 tablespoons olive oil
- 5 15- to 16-ounce cans kidney beans, rinsed, drained
- 1 medium-size red onion, finely chopped
- 1 1/2 cups walnuts, coarsely chopped
- 1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro, plus additional for garnish
- Romaine lettuce leaves
- Additional chopped walnuts

INSTRUCTIONS
1. Toast cumin in skillet over medium heat until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Whisk vinegar and oil in bowl to combine.
2. Combine kidney beans, onion, 1 1/2 cups walnuts, and 1/2 cup chopped cilantro in large bowl. Add vinegar and oil mixture. Crumble cumin seeds between fingers and add to bean mixture. Toss gently to blend; season with salt and pepper. Let salad stand at room temperature for 2 hours. (Can be made 6 hours ahead; refrigerate. Bring to room temperature before serving.)
3. Line and fill large bowl with lettuce leaves. Spoon salad into bowl. Garnish salad with additional cilantro and walnuts and serve.

Makes 10 servings