

HABITS

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to get food, it can provide a sense of normalcy. With more restaurants around town allowing for takeout of their healthy dishes, it can be fairly easy to get a nutritious meal at home without having to cook.

“It is still important to think about healthy meals that can be made at home,” Robinson wrote. “There are many healthier alternatives to longer shelf life foods such as nuts, eggs, whole grains (brown rice, oatmeal), frozen meats (chicken, fish), frozen or canned fruits and vegetables that have no salt added or added syrup.”

Robinson acknowledged healthy eating is not the same for everyone, but there are ways to maintain healthy habits that work for just about anyone. One suggestion she gave is to set goals around healthy eating and being active, and to share them with friends and family for encouragement and accountability.

Mental health

Daisy Thompson, a licensed clinical social worker for the Center for Human Development Inc., La Grande, said what people eat directly affects how they feel and behave.

“I am not saying that if you eat certain things you will feel happy, as research does not support that type of causation,” Thompson said. “However, I can say that eating certain types of foods is correlated with improved mental health and well-being.”

A diet higher in olive oil, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, fish and nuts combined with a lower intake of red meat, dairy and sweets is more likely to protect against developing or worsening existing



Staff photo by Sabrina Thompson

Local health experts advocate for achieving a balance among food groups, which means eating more whole foods without additives and eating less processed foods.

mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, Thompson said. This idea is supported by Robinson’s recommendations for eating.

Physical health

Thompson, who also is a professional dancer and dance instructor, said she has experienced firsthand the positive effects of physical activity.

“I have always understood that being active in my body, whether it be dancing, running, hiking or whatever, leads to positive mood states. I am a huge proponent of physical activity as a way to positively impact mood and emotional well-being,” Thompson said. “Simply put, when I am moving, I feel good, and I feel good for a while after.”

Local businesses, including LivFit, Peak and Nature’s Pantry, offer online sources for physical activity such as Zumba, yoga and pilates in addition to youth classes.

Setting goals

Even when you understand that healthy eating and exercise are important and are aware of the positive benefits of practicing it, actually doing these things can be a challenge.

Affording quality food can be difficult, and overcoming the hurdle of getting motivated can seem like too big of a task. And there is no easy solution, according to Thompson.

“Unfortunately, there is nothing magic here. Sometimes it is helpful to have supports like family, friends and therapists to help encourage and hold us accountable as we make positive lifestyle change,” Thompson said. “One

thing to know is that action begets action.”

For those struggling with the task of getting more active, Thompson advised that creating small achievable goals can yield better results. Instead of trying to do a half-marathon, for example, she said, start with taking a walk around the block. She said setting attainable goals will increase the likelihood of following through and of more goal making in the future.

Help is available

For families who financially struggle with healthy eating, Kim Adams with the Center for Human Development encouraged local people to call the center to check on their eligibility for the Women, Infants and Children Program, which provides nutritional food for pregnant, postpartum or breastfeeding women and families with children younger than 5 who meet income requirements.

Parents who have experienced job changes due to the pandemic now may be eligible for the benefits, and Adams said WIC has a quick turnaround for those who qualify, with food assistance coming within a week of certification.

Once approved, families receive assistance for purchasing WIC-approved food, such as eggs, milk, cheese, fruits and vegetables.

“It is easy to be on WIC during this current pandemic,” Adams said. “It is a bit easier since we are in a rural setting. Stores and vendors have been able to maintain steady in-stock for most WIC items. Those items that have been subject to panic buying have been addressed by the state WIC office and they have temporarily allowed different size packages or types of food to be purchased.”

WIC also provides guidance including nutrition education and recipes that use the food items approved by the program.

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