

You can tell that I am a farm girl. I know the weather forecast for the next week and plan my days accordingly. So it should come as no surprise that on Monday, I already knew the weekend forecast is fantastic. With that in mind, I plan to load up the kids on Saturday for Eagle Days at the Milford Nature Center and make a point to take a long, brisk walk in the afternoons. The weather is perfect for it and my body is telling me I need to get back into a walking routine balanced with healthier food choices. Not quite a New Year's resolution, but rather a post-holiday reality!

You may be thinking about walking, too! Walk Kansas season is right around the corner – March 16 thru May 10. In its' 13th year, Walk Kansas is once more being sponsored by K-State Research and Extension. How does the program work and how can you get involved? Co-workers, family members, friends and neighbors form teams of 6 people who will track minutes of physical activity and food choices during the 8-week challenge. Led by a team captain, each team identifies a goal, or challenge, it wants to reach. Each team member keeps track of and reports their weekly walking amounts, as well as their fruits and vegetables consumption. They report these to their team captain so that a running total can be maintained for the team. Prizes and recognition are given to teams on a weekly basis as well as for the 8-week program, as a whole.

It isn't too early to start thinking about who you would like to have on your team. Team packets will be available starting on January 27 and can be picked up at the Geary County Extension office at 119 E. 9th Street or you can print off the materials at www.geary.ksu.edu. All team registrations and individual participation forms need to be submitted to the extension office on or before February 25. The cost is \$7.00 per person for the 8-week program. Take the first step toward a healthier lifestyle by joining us for Walk Kansas, 2014.

"Next Steps" for a healthier you:

No one, including myself, should dive into a new physical activity plan without having a check-up from their doctor and doing a little reading to help them get started in a way that is both healthy and research-based. Make sure you have the doctor visit checked off of your pre-Walk Kansas checklist! Here are some reminders about healthy living through the Dietary Guidelines for Americans provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Look at any additional changes you might want to make before you get started with the Walk Kansas program.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend eating and physical activity patterns that promote overall health. While the guidelines are based on the most current

research, these recommendations also reflect food preferences, cultural traditions, and customs of the many and diverse groups living in the United States. Here are the highlights.

Balancing Calories

Enjoy your food, but eat less. Most Americans eat more calories (energy) than they use through daily activities and movement. Start by being aware of what, and how much, you are eating and begin to replace foods higher in calories with nutrient-dense foods and beverages. Nutrient-dense foods offer a high amount of nutrient content to the calories they contain. Think of nutrient-dense foods as being opposite of empty-calorie foods. Skim milk, for example, is a nutrient-dense beverage — rich in calcium and 8 ounces contains 90 calories. Soda is an empty calorie beverage — 105 calories in 8 ounces and no nutrients.

Avoid oversized portions. Research shows that we eat and drink more when given larger portions. Start to downsize servings by eating off a smaller plate, and stick with regular size meals when eating out. Say “no” to offers to supersize your meal.

Foods to Increase

Make half your plate fruits and vegetables. Go for variety and color when choosing these foods. Divide the other half of your plate between a protein and grain source.

Switch to fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products. If this is a challenge for you, make the switch gradually.

Foods to Reduce

Compare sodium in foods such as soup, bread, and frozen meals — choose foods with lower numbers. Most Americans are consuming too much sodium and the guidelines get specific on numbers. The average American has a daily sodium intake of 3,400 mg. The recommendation is 1,500 mg for most people, and not more than 2,300 mg.

Drink water instead of sugary drinks.

A major source of added sugars in the diets of Americans is soda, energy drinks, and sports drinks — up to 36 percent of added sugar.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services jointly create each edition of the dietary guidelines. They are revised and published every five years. For more information, visit: www.dietaryguidelines.gov

Now that you have the information, you can make a plan. Start now by taking steps toward a healthier lifestyle. Check with your doctor, learn what you need to adjust, and walk with us in Walk Kansas 2014! For more information on healthy lifestyle patterns

or the Walk Kansas program, contact me at the Geary County Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!