

Daily Union Article

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Title: Game Plan for Healthy Living

Isn't it a great feeling to be about to tout that you are number one at something? Even in the midst of basking in success, my coaches would always remind the team that you shouldn't get too wrapped up in the limelight. Rather, they would tell me to study the play book, practice the game plan, and be aggressively consistent in the execution of the play.

Right now, Kansas along with three other states in our CDC reporting region has the lowest number of persons diagnosed with influenza A and/or B. What that means is, we're #1 in ranking regions from lowest to highest incidence of the flu. I would like to believe that is because we are smart, prepared, aware, and consistent in our efforts to stay healthy during this flu season. However, just as my coaches would remind players to not get-over confident, I thought this might be the perfect time for us to study the play book, practice the game plan, and remind ourselves that we have to be diligent in our execution of the play. After all, we are still early in the flu season and sharpening our game as the season progresses is always a good strategy.

Study the Play Book: The best defense is a good offense. The first line of defense is in getting the flu shot. No whining, no grumping, and no excuses...except for a very limited few. The yearly flu vaccine is available at your doctor's office, the pharmacy you get your other medications, the local health clinic, the local health department, and often in a variety of other locations that host mobile flu clinics. Those who are 6 months of age and older should get vaccinated. High dose shots are recommended for older people, specifically for those who are over 65 years of age. If you have to be on defense – meaning you are diagnosed with influenza – the play book for this situation is simple. Stay home, stay hydrated, stay distant from the others you live with, and closely follow your doctor's orders (after all, they ARE your best health coach!)

Practice the game plan: Benjamin Franklin once said an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." It was true in his time and it remains true today. Washing your hands on a regular basis with warm soapy water is a great first play. It is easy to pick up germs when you turn the door handle to the bathroom, push the cart at the grocery store, or type on the same keyboard others use for their work. By washing your hands, you get rid of any of the germs you have picked up along your way and you also prevent spreading germs from one surface to another. When you're preparing a meal or handling dishes at home, washing your hands before you touch the food and table service can reduce spreading illness among family members.

Be consistent with your game plan by taking actions that help you remain healthy. The fall months offer a great opportunity to be active outdoors. The mild, if not cool, temperatures gives you the chance to enjoy the beautiful colors and pick up the pace on your physical activities. Brisk walks through the neighborhood or along one of the many beautiful trails we have in this area can get your heart pumping, tone your core, and reduce any stress you might have experienced during the day. Raking leaves and doing yard work is another great outdoor workout opportunity. Perhaps a bike ride is more your style where you can cruise your neighborhood and enjoy the colorful falling leaves.

This time of year is also well known for two important foods: apples and pumpkins. Pumpkin is a very healthy food that packs a powerful nutrition punch. This low calorie member of the squash family is extremely low in cholesterol and high in beta-carotene, an important antioxidant. Beta-carotene is one of the plant carotenoids converted to vitamin A in the body. In the conversion to vitamin A, beta carotene performs many important functions in overall health.

Apples also offer a lot of nutritional value to our diet. They are a great source of potassium, vitamins A and C, dietary fiber, calcium, and iron. Although the fall season nearly screams for hot apple cider, pace yourself with small servings. This beverage is loaded with lots of natural, but concentrated sugars. Another way to enjoy all that apples have to offer is to prepare a warm applesauce. The steps are simple:

Cut up peeled and cored apples. Place them in a slow cooker on high for about two hours or until they become mushy. Add a touch of cinnamon to taste and enjoy a healthy warm treat that also fills your home with all the aromas associated with fall weather.

A consistent game strategy includes making sure you take time to rejuvenate your body daily. After you have put in a full day that includes physical activity and healthful eating, take time to relax and get your mind prepared for a good night's sleep. Unwind with slow, smooth and calm breathing. Clear your mind of the day's activities and conversations.

You can be #1 on your personal health team. Consider how you study the play book, practice the game plan, and demonstrate your consistency in execution of the play.

For more tips on developing and protecting your personal health and wellness, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension at 785-238-4161 or check out our website at www.geary.k-state.edu. Until next week, keep living resourcefully!