

## Military OneSource Podcast — Easy Nutrition Tips for Military Life

### Episode transcript

#### Intro voice-over:

Hi, I'm Bruce Moody, and in this episode a military dietitian shares her expert nutrition advice and realistic ways to make your meals healthier. Whether you're cooking for one or feeding a family, you'll walk away with practical tips for meal-planning, making smarter food choices and building simple, sustainable habits. Share this episode with other service members or spouses who may benefit from this information. You can find us on any podcast platform. Just search for Military OneSource, and subscribe while you're at it. As always, we love your feedback. There is a link in the show notes where you can share your thoughts. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department offering support and resources for every step of military life. Now, here's today's conversation.

#### Bruce Moody:

Army Captain Frances White, welcome to the podcast.

#### Frances White:

Hi Bruce. Thank you for having me. Thank you.

#### Bruce Moody:

We're glad to have you with us. You're a registered dietitian. Where are you working?

#### Frances White:

Yes, I am a registered dietitian in the U.S. Army. I am currently working at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, and I work as the chief of patient room service.

#### Bruce Moody:

And for those who don't know, Walter Reed is just outside the boundary for Washington, D.C., in Maryland, so it's close to the Pentagon, close to us. Again, we're just glad to have you with us to talk about healthy eating and some meal-planning ideas. Give us an idea of who you are and what your background is.

#### Frances White:

Yeah, so as I mentioned, I have been at Walter Reed since October 2024. I've been an Army dietitian for almost six years now, but prior to joining the Army, I worked as a civilian dietitian in multiple roles, including acute care. I was the food service director for a hospital in Puerto Rico, but the last four years before signing with the military, I was a

dialysis dietitian. So, I have had a little bit of everything in my background before joining in.

**Bruce Moody:**

Yeah, but you seem to have a real passion for nutrition and teaching others. Where does that come from?

**Frances White:**

That's such a great question. With my formation as a dietitian, unfortunately I didn't feel that passion until I started working with patients on dialysis, which was almost like year two or three of becoming a dietitian after I became a dietitian. And it was when I started working with patients on dialysis that it clicked for me. I felt this passion for nutrition and teaching them. For me, it's just like when you explain patients very complex topics or nutrition terminology, and you explain it in a way that it's like simple, and it clicks for them, that for me it's like the best feeling in the world.

So, also very big on providing cultural appropriate recommendations but also recommendations that make sense to their situation. I think there are a lot of recommendations that, yeah they sound great in paper, but they might not be as feasible for that person, you know? So I try to meet my patients where they're at, so we can start working with their diet in that point.

**Bruce Moody:**

So, how do you do that? How do you get to that moment that you were describing? How do you get to where you are seeing people click?

**Frances White:**

For example, you have a patient with diabetes and renal disease and hypertension, and they come to you with this face — that, like, I don't know what to eat. They're telling me that I can't eat this, and I can't eat that, and I can't eat this, and this is all I have, or I don't have money to buy expensive food or healthy food. Combining, you know, all the recommendations in simple words and explaining it like, “Hey, all of that just means this.” And making it simple for them to follow and learn how to do it at home or maybe in social situations, can I translating that scientific information and jargon into something that they understand, it makes me happy. It makes me feel that, like, I'm meeting my purpose as a dietitian.

**Bruce Moody:**

Nice. So we're going to talk about healthy eating strategies, some ideas that you have. Maybe underlying that you can talk about the benefits for establishing healthy eating habits early in one's military career.

**Frances White:**

So I will say one of the things that I see the most, and I even saw it on myself when I joined the military. I joined quite late. It was past my 30s when I joined the military. Out

of the blue, I started eating super fast. I was just shoving my food in my mouth. And this is something that we learn in the military when we go to our basic training. So something as simple as rewiring the brain to slow down how fast you eat, it's one of the best steps and easiest steps that you can do for healthy eating because we don't tend to overeat that way.

So something that I tell my patients, take the time to eat. If you have 30 minutes for lunch, move away from your desk. Don't be distracted, so you can enjoy your food. But at the same time, recognizing that satiety cue when you're full, and you're not just done with eating after you clean the plate.

But also when we join the military and we start eating healthy, we feel better. Our readiness, it's better. We can also prevent the development of chronic diseases like hypertension, diabetes, heart diseases, just with healthy eating. And I know that we might have a very fast tempo, and we might not think that we have the time for it, however, we have to see it as an investment towards later in our life.

**Bruce Moody:**

I agree. What advice would you have for service members and families trying to maintain healthy eating habits but also managing a busy or unpredictable schedule?

**Frances White:**

Some of the tips that I share with my patients is keeping healthy foods at home and avoiding buying junk food. And I know that sometimes you just want to have it in the house just in case, if we get a visit or whatnot, but if you have it there, you're going to eat it. Versus if you have fruits and vegetables that they are eye level, they are out there on the counter, you will be more likely to grab those.

I also recommend patients do meal prep or maybe even creating a weekly menu that can help with that decision fatigue after you get out of work. Sometimes you're just so tired that you don't want to think of what you want to cook or what you have in the freezer to cook. So, creating a menu, it kind of helps you with that process when you're on your way to work. You already know what you have in the freezer or in the fridge. You already know what you're going to cook. You already know that you do or you do not have the ingredients for that meal. So that little preparation can give you a lot of advantage through the week.

And something that I also recommend, it's coming up with easy meals that you can prepare in 30 minutes or less. Sometimes we're very tired, we don't want to cook, but we need to put something in our stomach. So instead of going through the drive-through, think about easy meals that you can prepare at home. For example, you can prepare cheese quesadilla with maybe a side of guacamole, which is going to be the avocado, the healthy fat, and maybe a piece of fruit. It doesn't require that much planning or cooking, but it's something that it's easily prepared. It can take you, I don't know, five, 10 minutes to prepare that. So thinking about those meals that are very easy

to prepare when you don't feel like cooking, those are ideas that I think are worth keeping in mind for those moments.

**Bruce Moody:**

And just to stay on that for a little bit longer, how can meal prep serve not only as a time-saver, but also as a way to support overall wellness and performance and morale?

**Frances White:**

I consider meal prepping to be one of the best tools for busy parents or busy individuals. As you mentioned, it's not only like a time-saver, but it also saves money. It helps you to make sure that you include all the food groups that you have in your meals. You can also make sure that you're not wasting food because, you know, what you have in your house, in the fridge, in the pantry, you will use it. It doesn't go to waste. So it's like a win-win situation.

And I also encourage those service members that have kids to involve their kids in this process. When you have their buy-in — one, it's more likely that they will eat the food, but you're also teaching them healthy eating habits at that time. So making the time on a Saturday or on a Sunday to come up with a menu for the whole week can help you.

Or you can do some bulk cooking during the weekends. And something that you can do, it's perhaps preparing two pounds of ground beef in a very regular, basic flavor that then you can combine with different dishes, and you can have different dishes throughout the week. So one day you can have it with some pasta and some spaghetti sauce, and another day you can have it with a shepherd's pie, you can do like a potato layer with ground beef. So making proteins that are very versatile can help you to prepare multiple dishes from that same protein, and that can save a lot of time.

**Bruce Moody:**

Now what about some go-to tips for packing healthy budget-friendly meals, whether it's for duty or training or just life on the go?

**Frances White:**

Yeah, so something I recommended, it's buying in bulk or buying items that are seasonal, like fruits and vegetables based on the season. Take advantage of sales. Sometimes products are on sale. Something that I would keep in mind, making sure that you are not buying big portions of food, that they might go bad before you eat them, but you can buy them, put them in the freezer if you think they're going to go bad and, if you can, another thing for time, making sure that you leave them readily available the night before. So, don't leave it in the fridge or leave it in the fridge in an area that is not very visible. But whenever I pack my snacks, I leave them on the counter, right next to my keys if it's possible. So that way, I just grab my keys, I grab my snacks and I go, because sometimes you don't hear the alarm, or something happened when you were getting ready and maybe you're a little bit late. The last thing you're going to remember is to pack your snack when you're in a hurry. So leaving that ready the night before, it

can save so much time, but it also guarantees you that it's going to be available there, and you won't forget. And then you won't have to stop at a gas station or maybe a vending machine to get a snack because you forgot the one that you were thinking about bringing. It can be like buying a couple of fruits and leaving them in the counter where you have already oranges, apples, prunes, nectarines.

But let's say that something happened, you forgot to pack your snack. I can recommend, maybe you can stop at a gas station, and you can get a protein shake with a fruit, or you can get a yogurt with a fruit. I have seen that they have cheese sticks, and that's something that you can eat with some wheat crackers. You can get a small fruit juice and a cheese stick. So even in these situations, where perhaps we normally go for chips and snacks that are not as healthy, you can find healthy options that can help you until you're able to have a regular meal or go home and cook a healthy meal.

**Bruce Moody:**

Now, many people struggle with developing a taste for healthy foods, especially if they didn't grow up eating it. So what are some ways that you encourage people to get excited about nutritious foods?

**Frances White:**

This question is funny because it happened to me. I didn't grow up eating salads. So I remember one day I was in college, and I was in the dining hall, and I saw this girl, she was eating a Caesar salad, but she was eating this Caesar salad with passion. She was enjoying the Caesar salad in a way that I have never seen anyone eating a salad. And I looked at her and was like, I want that for me. I want to be able to eat a salad and enjoy it that much. So I started experimenting with salads and toppings and dressings and whatnot. So I definitely relate to these questions.

So, I will say adding vegetables already to the meals that you already eating at home, it can be the easiest way. You can have some vegetable skewers, maybe adding vegetables to stews, even a pico de gallo. Pico de gallo is something that is so delicious, and it's just like chopped tomatoes with cilantro and onions, and that can be a source of a vegetable, and it's something that a lot of people enjoy.

For those of you who have picky eaters or maybe kids that are in that stage where they don't want to eat vegetables, I will say, make sure that you cook it and present it in different ways. So, let's talk about broccoli. You're going to present it or eat it raw. Another time you can steam it. Another time you can stir-fry it. Another time you can add it to mac and cheese. Another day you can cook like a cheese and broccoli soup. So those are ways that you are adding the same food and presenting the same food to different meals and see which one they accept. So yeah, looking into ways on how to add those veggies into the plate will be the easiest way to get into that habit.

**Bruce Moody:**

Nice. Any superfoods or staples that are affordable and, maybe, practical for the military lifestyle?

**Frances White:**

Yeah, so I actually don't like calling foods "superfoods." I think they can fit on the plate, but there are a few foods that I think they're very versatile and affordable. So, for example, peanut butter — it has protein, it has a good source of fat, it's easily accessible, something that is, like, shelf-stable so you can have it in the office. Greek yogurt, so high protein, we have calcium, we have vitamin D, something that you can eat by itself. You can add fruit, you can add it to smoothies. So, there's so many things that you can do with Greek yogurt.

I have also seen a lot of recipes with cottage cheese, and I know some people don't like the consistency of cottage cheese. I have seen many recipes where you're basically cooking with it, and you don't see the consistency of the crumbs. Another one that I can recommend, I will say, it's chia seeds — they are packed with fiber, Omega-3. They also have a good amount of protein. If you're looking for more sources of protein, I can think about tuna — we can find it canned, we have pouches. So I'll say those are the main ones that I can think for someone who is on the go and maybe in a budget.

**Bruce Moody:**

Nice. Well, I really appreciate you joining us today. It's a lot of good information, and I just invite any final thoughts. Any motivational messages about embracing healthy food and food planning?

**Frances White:**

I will say, just take one baby step at a time. I think when people decide to eat healthy and lose weight and whatnot, they want to do it all at once. I recommend people to take one little step at a time, and once they are comfortable with that little step, then you choose another goal. But trying to do it all at once, it's not necessarily the best approach. So, if you want to eat more vegetables and fruit overall, make sure that you add a fruit to your breakfast every single day. And once you get used to that, it's something that comes out natural, and you don't have to think about it, okay maybe now we can think about adding a vegetable to all your lunch meals and so on. So making sure that we're doing baby steps, choosing goals that are doable and reachable, that will be my best advice.

**Bruce Moody:**

Excellent. We'll leave it there. Captain White, thank you for joining us on the podcast.

**Frances White:**

Thank you, Bruce. I appreciate you. Thank you so much for the opportunity.

**Bruce Moody:**

Very welcome. Want to remind everybody that Military One Source is an official resource of the Defense Department. We always like to hear from you. We have a link in the program notes. You can send us a question, a comment or an idea for a future

episode. And be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to podcasts because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life. I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.