

The Secret Ingredients of Family Nutrition

Webinar transcript

Christina Piechoski:

Welcome to today's webinar titled "The Secret Ingredients of Family Nutrition." Healthy family meals can be daunting and confusing. This presentation will help the listener identify components of healthy meals, develop strategies for meal planning, compare home cooked vs. takeout family meals, and explore positive outcomes of family and community meals. We are thrilled to have with us today, Maria McConville, M.S., R.D.N., senior nutrition health educator.

Ms. McConville is a senior nutrition health care educator for CHAMP. She is a registered dietitian, certified personal trainer and health and wellness coach. Trained in the Army's Master Resilience Program, she combines her military knowledge with her love of nutrition and fitness to empower others to strive for nourishment in mind, body and soul. Without further delay, I will turn things over to Maria.

Maria McConville:

Thank you very much. I really appreciate being here today. As you said, I am Maria McConville, senior nutrition health educator with the Henry Jackson Foundation, and we are going to be talking today about the secret ingredients of family nutrition.

Just to get some of the housekeeping things over with, what I will talk about today are my own opinions and they do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the Department of Defense, the Uniformed Services University, or the Henry Jackson Foundation. I am fortunate enough to work with the agency called, CHAMP, and CHAMP is the Consortium for Health and Military Performance. And CHAMP's goal is to promote healthy behaviors in service members, and military families that improve performance, help maintain readiness, and build resilience.

Total Force Fitness is the framework to help optimize the performance of service members by considering these eight interrelated domains. This presentation is obviously primarily going to focus on the nutrition domain, and by the end of this presentation, you should be able to identify components of healthy meals, develop strategies for meal planning, recognize the benefits of the Mediterranean diet, compare home cooked vs. takeout family meals, and explore positive outcomes of family or community meals.

So, let us get into the fun part. 90,000. What does that number represent? Well, did you know that over the course of a lifetime, the average person who lived the average life expectancy now, that is upwards of over 82-years or so, will eat about 90,000 meals? And that is based on eating about three meals per



day. So, 90,000 decisions that we have to make over a lifetime or when we were young that somebody has to make for us.

Prior to COVID, Americans ate about 50% of their meals away from home. So, we were eating half of our meals out, but maybe over the past year, you have eaten more meals at home, and maybe those meals have been shared with those you live with, be it family, friends or roommates. So, as you will hear, eating with others can definitely be a good thing. With all those meals, 90,000 of them, you think that we have healthy eating figured out, right? Well, not necessarily. What are dietary habits that are healthy, and why don't we always make the healthiest choices? Good question. Knowing what to eat can be very confusing. Why is it so confusing to know what to eat? Well, we have individual needs. We all have different DNA. We may have some differing medical conditions. Our body types are different, occupations that we are in, our levels of physical fitness.

A lot of times there is information or confusing information because we are not really sure who to believe. What we hear about one day in the news, or in the newspaper, or on our devices, or from our friends, or the movie stars, or whoever we are paying attention to, that can be refuted the next day. So, we are just not sure who to believe or what to believe. And eating healthy can have many obstacles, like limited knowledge of what, and how to cook, limited time or no interest in cooking. Maybe, we have some complex living situations, like living in barracks or not having kitchen access, maybe we do not have a vehicle or we have limited financial resources.

So, how do you know if we are eating our own healthiest diet? That is a very individualized question. What is good for me may not be good for you. What is good for you, may not be good for your spouse or your kids or your friends and so often, we try to put ourselves into buckets. Like if this diet works for this person, it has got to work for me, or if this way of eating was good for this person, it must be good for everyone. But that is not true.

And there are different ways to assess whether our eating habits are serving us well. So, I like to use the term "serving as well" because so often, we only use the scale as a measurement tool for whether we are eating the right way or eating the healthiest foods. But the scale is just one indicator and should not be the only one. We can also look at our energy levels like, how our eating habits fueling our energy. Do we have good energy to get through the day doing all the things that we need to do? We could take a look at different medical conditions. We know that our lifestyle, habits with exercise and eating included, can influence things such as diabetes, heart disease, maybe some cancers, gastrointestinal disorders, high blood pressure and other medical conditions.

We can also look at our lab indices. We all go and have our blood drawn periodically. Our labs are drawn to look at our cholesterol levels, to look at our blood sugar, triglycerides, iron levels and so many different things. We can also take into account our individualized palates. Everybody's taste is different. I happen to be somebody who cannot stand olives for some reason, and celery. Those are the two things I do not like, but people always say, "Oh, my gosh. As a dietitian, I cannot believe you do not like olives. Celeries are such healthy foods." Agree, they are healthy foods, but for some reason, I do not like them. My palate is different than other people's.

Also, our upbringing, things that we were raised on. Foods that we were raised on, they can elicit either positive or negative memories, or just what we had access to at the time. I grew up in northern Ohio,



and so when I married into the military and also went into the military myself, we were stationed a lot in the South, and so, some of the eating habits that people had in the South were foreign to me. I was not raised on some of those things. So, our upbringings can have a big influence on our eating habits.

And then of course, our beliefs. Sometimes, our beliefs about eating are good beliefs, but sometimes, our beliefs are not as good, and they can be holding us back from making healthy choices, such as believing that healthy food is too expensive, or that it is too time consuming. So, you can see that it is very individualized, and can be really complicated. Why? We sometimes do not know what to eat.

So, as you consider healthy family meals, ask yourself what your biggest obstacles might be to eating healthy at home. Maybe, you do not know what healthy foods are? Maybe you cannot afford to buy healthy foods? How many of you have picky eaters at home? And maybe you do not like to cook, or feel that you do not have time to cook. So, knowing what to eat, affording healthy food, preparing those foods and accommodating your picky eaters can be overwhelming and daunting. I know, I get it. I have got three kids. Yeah, they are adults now, but I remember all the struggles we had when they were younger.

So, let us tackle these one at a time. The first secret ingredient in family nutrition is knowing what to eat. Sometimes, we forget the basics. What exactly is healthy eating? Well, the USDA's Choose My Plate graphic, helps us figure it out. You probably all have seen the graphic where half of the plate is filled with fruits and vegetables, maybe a quarter of the plate with a protein, and the other quarter with a high-quality starch. So, this picture here depicts that. You can see that we have got some yummy apples and oranges, we have got some mixed vegetables that are green, we have got some salmon and some pasta. And so, that is a pretty good depiction of the USDA's Choose MyPlate. As well as you can see, a glass of milk or some type of dairy substitute up in the corner. So, this has been the USDA's icon of choice for the last, I would say, 10 years or so. And so, it is a pretty good depiction of how we can plan the basics of our meals.

The good thing is, we can find all kinds of recipes online, right at our fingertips; either on our phones, on our tablets, on our computers. If you do not want to find recipes that way, we can use the good old fashioned cookbooks that we all have collected.

There are magazines with recipes. We do have apps on our phones that have recipes and then also a lot of times on the package. So a food product that you buy often will have a recipe on it. So there are all kinds of ways that we can figure out what we can make with the foods that we have on hand. So often I love to just challenge myself, look in the refrigerator, look in the cabinet and see what ingredients I have and then start typing those ingredients into a search engine and sure enough a recipe will come up that has those ingredients in it. So it is really, really fun to be able to take the things that you have on hand and come up with a new recipe.

The Mediterranean diet has time and again been determined to be the best overall general diet plan. The reason that the Mediterranean diet is so well evaluated is, it is plant centered. It is high in fiber. We all know that fibers are necessary nutrients that most Americans do not get enough of. Fiber is great for helping us move things through our intestinal tract as well as for managing our cholesterol levels. The Mediterranean diet is low in saturated fat, which we know is good for our heart health. It is high in many vitamins and minerals, as well as high in antioxidants. So antioxidants are those properties on food that



help to guard against cell damage. When we have inflammation and when we have cell damage, this is what can lead to diseases and disorders. So it is really important that we include many foods in our diet that have antioxidants. If you think of that depiction, I am sure you have seen with the eat the rainbow. So we are really encouraged to eat foods that have vibrant colors in them, particularly our fruits and vegetables, that these provide us with a lot of antioxidants and the Mediterranean diet espouses the same thing. The Mediterranean diet limits red meat, but includes fish several times a week. So you can see all the yummy looking foods here on the slide that make up the components of the Mediterranean diet. Is also fairly low in sweet that have added sugars, as opposed to things like fruits that have naturally occurring sugars.

So one of the obstacles that we have, it might be, how do we build a meal that looks and tastes good? Well, we eat with our eyes first, right? So the plate that we prepare needs to be appealing. You can see here that maybe this plate is not that appealing because everything is white from the plate to the rice to the chicken. Well, they did throw in like a little speck of pretty rosemary there just to give it a little bit of color and depth. But because we eat with our eyes first, if we see something that is not necessarily enticing to us, we may not want to be eat those foods. So color is important. Textures are important. We do not want to fill our plate with all of the same textures. Also different shapes are more interesting to our eye. And we can also look for complementary food. So complementary foods, I think of things like pork and apples or beans and rice, so foods that seems to go together and are very complementary of each other. We can also think about seasoning. Seasonings can make a big difference. Seasoning up with herbs and spices can complement our food, not only in their appearance, but also in their tastes.

So how do we go about building a healthy plate? I recommend that you pick your proteins first. So maybe it is chicken. Maybe it is fish. Maybe it is meat. Maybe it is a vegetarian option of beans or tofu or something. Pick your proteins and then look for some complimentary vegetables. Something that might add some different color or texture or flavor to your plate. And then consider starch that might go along with it. Do you have to have all these components? No, not necessarily, but a starch like on here, this is white rice. Does not do much for the plate as we talked about, but it might be OK to put white rice with a brightly colored meat, a dark meat that has a beautiful – maybe wine reduction sauce on it or something, so you can see how different colors can complement other colors. Fruits are always good because they tend to have really pretty colors as well as a lot of good nutrients. And then a dairy or milk substitute, water, or if you are following the Mediterranean diet and are someone who enjoys a little bit of alcohol, wine, especially red wine is shown to have some benefits to health especially to heart health.

So another one of the obstacles that we talked about is affording to eat healthy. So affording to eat healthy is not always easy. We know that most of us live on a budget and that food is definitely something that has to be budgeted for. So some recommendations for eating healthy on a budget would be to take some time to sit down and go over a budget. It is not a task that we like to do. But if you can sit down and look at all your expenses, look at your income and then compare that to your expenses, then how much can you allocate towards food? And when you are looking at what you have allocated towards food, limit the foods that do not provide you nutrition.

If you were to go to your refrigerator and your cabinets and start pulling out all the foods that you feel like, “Yes, these are foods that definitely lead to better health, better weight, better energy levels, better mood,” leave those in your refrigerator and in your cabinets. But if you are finding ones that you feel that are not helping you meet your nutrition goals or your weight goals or your “feeling good” goals



or your “avoiding diseases” goals, then those would be the foods that, do not bother spending money on them. Remember, you can only eat what you bring into the house. So often people will say, “Well, how do I get my kids not to eat these foods?” And I think, “Well, you are the one bringing them into the house. So if you do not want your kids to eat them, do not bring them into the house.” Or if you’ve got someone who brings things in the house and they are not helping you meet your goals, I always say, “Put them away. Do not leave them on the counter” because what happens, as soon as we walk into the kitchen, our eyes are drawn to what is left out on the counter. So if we are leaving cookies and chips and things out on the counter, that is what we are going to eat.

I would say try to fill your counters with some nicely fresh squash, in-season fruits and that is what your eyes will be drawn towards and that is what you will eat. So when I say, pay it forward, I mean – you know, sometimes we have to pay a little bit more for healthy food, hopefully that will make it such that we are not spending money eventually on medications and doctor visits. And so by allocating a little bit more of our resources to those healthy foods, that is helping us pay it forward. Stock up on some low-cost healthy foods like beans and lentils. You can buy foods in bulk and we will talk about that in a minute.

In-season foods are really important. I mean, we all like to have different fruits and vegetables at all times of the year, but certain things have to be flown in or trucked in from other countries or way across the country that it is not in season in our area and typically we are going to pay a lot more for those. And because of the long transit time or what we call a large carbon footprint, those foods may have lost some of their healthy nutrients. And then of course, eliminating impulse buying. We all know the saying, “Do not go to the grocery store when you are hungry because then we tend to fall victim of the impulse buying.” But nowadays it is so much easier not to be victim of impulse buying. In addition to planning our meals and making shopping lists, we can order food online, either to have curbside pickup or to be delivered to our home. And of course with a lot of different meal delivery services. Those are options as well.

I mentioned buying in bulk. So I know it is very common nowadays and popular for people to go to the stores where you can buy things in bulk. And if it is an item that your family and you use typically, I think it is a great idea for saving money. What I would say is when you come home from the grocery store, make sure that you portion them out because how many times do we throw something in the freezer or in a cabinet somewhere and forget about it and then we end up throwing it away. So take a little bit of time when you get home. I think this picture on the slide here is perfect for showing you, like you if you invest in some containers, that you can portion things out. I would say the same thing about your fruits and vegetables. A lot of times people say they just end up wasting their fruits and vegetables because they come home from the grocery store, they leave it in the plastic bags. They throw it in those bottom ends of the refrigerator and they forget about it until they spoil. So take some time when you get home. Wash your produce, maybe even cut it up, put it in that bowl on your counter or put it in a nice bowl or something, nice container in the refrigerator right at eye level. So when you open the refrigerator, instead of forgetting about those fruits and vegetables that are down there in the bottom, then you will have them right there in front of you and they are ready to go.

Or maybe you take some time to cut up some carrots and celery and zucchini and whatever else you like and put them in some Ziploc bags, so that way when you are in a hurry, as we all are, instead of opening



the refrigerator and not having anything healthy that you can grab, grab one of those little plastic baggies full of the vegetables that you have taken the time to cut up ahead of time for a quick snack.

Meal time can be frustrating when you have picky eaters. I know and it can seem like it is a never-ending battle, but I would really urge you to avoid power struggles with food. Some healthy strategies might include introducing healthy foods multiple times. They say that with kids, we have to introduce foods 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 times before they will actually maybe start liking them. So, just be patient and slowly introduce healthy food. Giving choices and what I mean by choices, I do not mean like, “OK, you can either eat your broccoli or you can eat a cookie.” Giving choices, maybe, it is broccoli or carrots or maybe it is cantaloupe or apple. So, when you give kids choices, it makes them feel like they are more in control.

Another thing that I used to do when my kids were younger and they would come home from school and want a snack, maybe they would say, “Could I have a cookie or could I have this granola bar?” or something and I would always say, “Sure, you can have that but let us have a piece of fruit first and then you can have the cookie or the granola bar whatever when you are done.” And so, they would eat the piece of fruit and half of the time forget that they even wanted the granola bar, the cookie and they would be off, so giving them the options where they feel like they are more in control is always helpful.

Also, remember that food jags are not unusual especially with younger kids. They oftentimes will not eat anything but two or three items. That is not unusual, but I would say, “Check with the dietician or pediatrician if you feel that the child is not gaining weight as they should and they are malnourished or they are sick.” So we do not want them to miss out on important nutrients and that is why it is important if it goes on too long, to discuss that with their pediatrician or their dietician.

I would also encourage you not to use food as a punishment or reward. Studies show that when we use food as a punishment or reward, it can lead to some unhealthy habits in adolescence and then in teenagers. So, again, not using food as a punishment or reward and then finding ways to sneak nutrients in. I always baked bread in my bread machine when my kids were little. It is a great way to sneak in shredded carrots or zucchini, you can put in wheat germ and flaxseed and all kinds of things that they do not know are in their bread or smoothies is another fabulous way to put lots of fruits and vegetables in. And as I mentioned, try to keep fruit and healthy foods in your bowls on your counter or at eye level for your family members in the refrigerator.

Involve the kids as much as possible. You know, kids sometimes, we can get frustrated because it takes too long, but I think when we have the time, which I realize is not every meal or even every day, allow the kids to participate, maybe it is on the weekend. Maybe they can help with the menu planning. I got to where – I was so tired of planning menus that I would have the kids sit down with me on a Sunday evening and they would each take a turn planning a meal during the week and that helped to give me the shopping list that I needed for the next day. And then when it was their night to have their meal, they would help me and the rule was they were not allowed to complain about each other’s meals. So, it really helped me cut down on what I had to figure out to prepare and involve them in the process and also cut down on the complaining. So, maybe they can help chop vegetables like this young man with his daughter. Maybe they can help with washing things. Maybe they can set the table and maybe they can help with the cleanup. So, involve the kids as much as possible.



And I would encourage you to think about that you do not have to prepare separate kids meals. I know when we eat out, there tends to be a kids' menu because it is cheaper and maybe more of the foods that are palatable to children, but I would say that if you are spending a lot of time making separate meals for kids and for adults, then encourage your kids to eat as much of the same foods that the adults eat as possible.

Of course, I know that preparing healthy food is time consuming. There are some great tips or hacks as we would call them. Obviously, you know about things like Crockpots and Instant Pot. I am really a big fan of one-pot and one-pan recipes. You can Google all kinds of things and find great cookbooks on those. Sometimes it is advantageous to buy pre-cut food so that we do not have to take the time to wash and chop and peel things.

They tend to be a little bit more expensive, but time is money, so if that fits in with your budget, buy some pre-cut food, and also precooked food from grocery stores. Have precooked foods, and of course we talked a little bit and we will some more about companies and businesses that you can order precooked food from.

Some people like to participate in community-sponsored agriculture. Those are local farmers that you can sign up with, maybe through an organization to have a weekly or biweekly basket of produce delivered. What's really fun about that is sometimes in my CSA box, I'll get things that are not typically on my repertoire of fruits and vegetables and so then I'll Google a recipe of how to prepare them. And so it can break you out of your mold of eating the same fruits and vegetables over and over again. And as I mentioned, there's options for home delivery services.

Having a plan is crucial to success in any part of our lives, and so in order to eat healthy or to make time for cooking or learning to cook or dealing with picky eaters, having a plan is the first step. So I would really encourage you to set a goal. So if you have something in your eating habits for your family that maybe you need to change, maybe you need to get some more vegetables in there or a greater variety of vegetables or cut down on added-sugar products, set a goal and maybe you can do some meal planning and meal prepping.

You can figure out how many meals you're able to make that week. As we talked about earlier, with the basics, figure out your proteins, your vegetables, fruits and complementary starches and then look for recipes, if you need those. Make your grocery list. Place your grocery order, go shopping. And as I mentioned, take some time to prep those foods when you come home. I think that's an invaluable step that a lot of us don't do. And then make sure your kitchen is clean and stocked with the utensils that you need so that you can set yourself up for success.

Again, we talked about some of the tools and hacks that we can use, so meal-planning apps, the USDA has one called Start Simple with MyPlate. They also have one called FoodKeeper. But you can also find on your devices, some general meal-planning apps, those for time-crunched cooks, some for weight loss or those who are really into the social media. Some from, who do meal prepping, what you can do with your leftovers and for budgeting. So, all of these are right at our fingertips.

This slide is kind of busy, but it's a slide that shows you kind of a depiction of the grocery store. We've all heard the saying, shop the perimeter of the grocery store, and the reason for that is the things that are along the perimeter, when you think about your dairy, when you think about your chicken and your fish



and your meat as well as your produce, tend to be the things on the perimeter, whereas those on the interior part of the store tend to be the more processed foods.

You can see that those foods there are with the red bar, those would be things that you would want to watch out for because they are more of what we call empty-calorie foods. So, empty-calorie foods are foods that give you a lot of calories, but really not much nutrition.

You can find some good healthy foods in the middle aisles like tuna, beans, lentils, nuts and nut butters, and those could be good staples to keep in your cabinets as well as some whole-grain cereals and whole-grain pastas and rice and those types of things.

I want to touch a minute on meal prepping. Meal prepping has become really popular. I know lots of people who meal prep; I've meal prepped at times and it can be a great tool. Meal prepping saves time in the long run. It really helps us with portion control. It helps us to make good decisions and they find studies show that people who do meal prepping tend to eat much more fruits and vegetables, much fewer convenience and fast foods, less saturated fat and less sodium that's associated with fast foods and convenience foods. So meal prepping can be great.

Meal prepping can be a shared adventure that you can do with other people in your family and I think that as you continue to do it, it will get easier.

What we're going to look at now is a comparison of a takeout menu versus homemade. I know that meal prepping seems daunting and sometimes you think it's just going to be easier to get convenience foods, and I agree, there's probably times that it is going to be easier to get convenience food, but I wanted to just give you a little bit of an example of the difference between them.

So what you can see here is this is the comparison of a takeout versus homemade meal. This is a chicken dinner for four. So when we're looking at the cost and we're comparing similar things, fast food fried chicken as opposed to a roasted chicken, mashed potatoes, similar to diced potatoes, green beans versus carrots and then some biscuits, the total cost for this for a family of four of a takeout fried chicken meal was \$22.99 as opposed to a local grocery store, where I live here in the Washington DC area, a roasted chicken, the potatoes, carrots and biscuits for a family of four was \$10.87. So you can see it's less than half of what you would pay for a takeout meal and you probably would have leftovers too.

In addition to the cost comparison, you can also see what the nutrition comparison is. So with our calories alone, the takeout meal in the 700s versus not even 500 for the home-cooked meal. Then when we compare some of the important nutrients, you can see how high in fat the takeout meal was, 34 grams as opposed to only 6 grams for the chicken, and this would be like a chicken you could roast in your oven, a whole chicken or in your Crockpot or your Instant Pot or however you wanted to cook it.

And then when you look at the difference in sodium, a takeout, salt is about twice as much as... I included a half a teaspoon of salt with the chicken as you roasted some of these things. So, quite significantly less in the sodium comparison for the two.

We know that choosing takeout options are what we need to go to occasionally dealing with life circumstances when we're not always able to cook at home and we know that they're not as healthy, and over time if we make that choice too often, that could contribute to weight gain and potential



disease states. We know weight management is especially important for service members and for family members who support their service members.

I would give you some tips here for weight management, is focusing more on nourishing the body. When I've worked with clients and patients in the past, I try not to get them to focus on dieting, because dieting is not inspiring. Nobody ever says they want to go on a diet with a joyful voice; it's something that we do with dread and resignation. It causes us to realize how much willpower and discipline we're going to have. But if you can focus on nourishing your body, that's a much brighter approach.

Something to keep in mind would be portion sizes. So it may not even be that we're eating foods that are that unhealthy, but if we're eating too many of them too often, that might be part of the problem.

And don't discount sleep. Sleep is so important on our weight. We know that when we don't get enough sleep, it can throw some of our hormones out of balance like cortisol, which tells the body to hang onto fat, like leptin and ghrelin, which are the hunger and satiety hormones, can get confused.

And also when we don't get enough sleep and we're tired, we want those foods that comfort us, the foods that are high in fat, the foods that are high in sugar and maybe the salty crunchy ones. When we're tired and we're not motivated, it's not usually the broccoli and Brussels sprouts that we're reaching for.

And of course we want to resist fad diets. We all know that fad diets can work temporarily. A lot of times they just reduce water weight, but they're not something sustainable and unfortunately when we follow a fad diet, they can lead us on a vicious cycle.

It's really great to set specific goals. If you have something you know you need to work on. One of the questions I like to ask my clients is, if there was something you could start doing today or something you could stop doing today that would help your family eat healthier, what would that one thing be? And when you've identified that, put it into a SMART goal. A SMART goal is something that's measurable. It's specific. It's action-based. It's realistic and it's timed, and keep each other accountable for those goals.

So I know, you've had a busy day. The kids have all kinds of activities. You don't feel like cooking. You don't even feel like sitting down together as a family, and you question the amount of work that it takes to cook a healthy meal. But I want to show you that sitting down to a family meal is worth it. You don't have to be a great cook to have family or community dinners. Connecting with one another is the point and studies show many health benefits to eating together. They show that we can improve kids' and adults' communication skills. It encourages better eating habits amongst our family members. It may even help to prevent future psychosocial issues.

Families who eat together tend to have fewer weight problems when people reach adulthood. And of course it helps to teach our children about table manners, about basic food preparation and also about basic nutrition.

Eating together provides a time to be connected, as we said. If you can focus on enjoying each other's company, that's a really big plus. And then use mealtimes to teach children about family values and traditions. I encourage you to keep mealtime conversations positive and to let each person talk about their day or something that's on their mind. As we talked about not using food as a punishment or



reward, it's important to schedule maybe difficult or disciplinary conversation for some other time and not during mealtime.

And of course, we all know we should turn off our distractors, our TVs, our computers, tablets, phones, toys, books, whatever it is that's taking our attention away from being connected to one another and enjoying our meal together.

And we encourage you to balance your intake with activity. And so maybe there is some traditions that you and your family have had for activity or maybe you could make a goal of starting a new one. Choose activities that everybody can join in on; taking walks or hikes, maybe playing kickball, going bowling if bowling alleys are ever back open, participating in a fun run, scavenger hunts or even little exercise challenges. So many possibilities for new traditions or activities that you can start with your family.

So I know we've talked about a lot today. I hope you've gotten some good information. And I would like you to take a minute just to think about one actionable step. A minute ago I had said if there was one thing that you could start doing or stop doing to improve your family's nutrition, think about what that one thing would be, and maybe an actionable step that you could take today to make that improvement.

It may be helpful to create it as a long-term goal and then set some short-term goals around that. So if a goal would be to eat more vegetables in your family, maybe a long-range goal would be to be able to be eating three vegetables a day, and so a short-range goal might be starting with one vegetable a day, or maybe it's, you know, experimenting with some new vegetables so you can increase your family's repertoire.

I think it's a good idea to help each other stay accountable so you can ask your family members or even friends who are trying to make healthier goals how they're doing and provide them encouragement and accountability just like they can provide you.

I encourage you to write your goals down because studies show that if we can put things in writing, we're much more likely to achieve them. So start with one thing you can focus on, make it a SMART goal, enlist the support of others and maybe start some new traditions in your family.

We have a great website called HPRC-online.org, many, many health and wellness articles, blogs, different types of infographics that you can find on our website. So please, please, please take some time to look at the HPRC-online.org website. We also have a sister site, the Operation Supplement Safety. You can find that on the site as well.

So here are some of the resources on the HPRC website that are in association with some of the points that I talked about today. We would love to know what questions you have, so please, if you have more questions, contact us at the HPRC-online.org/ask-the-expert site, we will get back to you with answers to the health questions that you have. And again, I've already told you about all the different resources that we have available on the HPRC-online sites and here are some of the areas of information that we've got on our site.



And as always, we're trying to meet the needs of our constituents, of our service members and their family members and the community. If you have a minute to fill out a few questions on a session evaluation that we have here, we would value your input. Thank you very much!

And thank you so much for joining in on this presentation, whether you're listening to it live or recorded, and please let us know how we can help you in the future and best wishes to you and your family on the secrets of family nutrition!

Christina Piechoski:

Thank you Maria! Let's give everyone who is attending live a chance to type any questions into the question box. And it looks like we've got a question, is the sample grocery list and Mediterranean list the same?

Maria McConville:

On the resources, the sample grocery list, I do not believe that the sample grocery list – the smart grocery on – sample grocery list and worksheet, I think that one is geared towards meal prepping. So the sample grocery list is, we've got some resources on our site that are around meal prepping and so I believe that the sample grocery list is geared around that, but a lot of our worksheets and things are based around the Mediterranean diet.

But this one comes from our Get into Fighting Weight guide. It's a guide that we have for active-duty service members, but also their families to look at, and it kind of gives you some things to stock your cabinets with, such as different produce. It also has proteins like skinless chicken, turkey, ground beef, chicken, turkey, salmon, canned salmon and tuna, beans, nuts and seeds. So it's very much in line with a Mediterranean diet, but it doesn't say specifically Mediterranean diet.

Christina Piechoski:

OK. Thank you for that! Just my thanks for an outstanding and information-filled presentation! Thank you, this is great information! And what are some good sweet-tooth substitutions when transitioning your family?

Maria McConville:

That's a really great question. So, you know, now the food labeling has started including added sugar. So that's a really great tool. You can start looking at different products and seeing how much added sugar is in there.

I mean, one of my favorite things, I don't know if kids necessarily, younger kids would necessarily like that, is dark chocolate. I love the dark chocolates that are about 70% cocoa. When you pick – and they're more expensive – but like a dark cocoa chocolate bar has, the dark chocolate has so many good antioxidant properties to it, and because it's low in sugar, it's not sweet, so you can't eat much of it. It's pretty rich. And so if you eat a square after a meal, like a dark chocolate, I find that it kind of helps to satisfy that sweet craving, but because it's rich and maybe even just slightly bitter, you don't really want a whole lot of it. So you kind of feel like it's a treat because it's chocolate and you feel like it's a little bit decadent, but it also, you know, confers some really good health properties.



I would say, you know, fruits are always good. I love fresh berries. And I don't think that there is anything wrong with maybe just sprinkling a tiny bit of sugar or some honey on some fresh fruit, because when you think about it, yes, you might be getting a few calories or a little bit of sweetness from the sugar or the honey, but there's so many good properties to our fruit.

So if you can get kids to eat say blueberries and strawberries, and strawberries are in season right now, and as some of the other berries come into season, even if you have to put a tiny bit of sugar on them, the nutrients that the kids are going to reap from eating those berries are going to be so much more beneficial than the worry of having a tiny bit of sugar.

I remember when my kids were little, when they would have sleepovers and such, I would make chocolate chip pancakes in the morning because my kids always loved chocolate chip pancakes, and I used to have people say to me, I can't believe as a dietitian you give your kids chocolate chip pancakes. And I used to say well, you know, the tradeoff for a few chocolate chip sprinkled in there, there's also like wheat germ and flaxseed and a whole bunch of other things in there.

So I think, you know, especially when we're dealing with kids, the tradeoff is like, yeah, there's a couple of chocolate chips in here, but there's a whole lot of other healthy nutrients in there as well. So I think to just slowly withdrawing from, from sugar is a good thing.

So many of the beverages, even sometimes the fruit drinks and the beverages that kids have are so full of sugar that like just getting kids to appreciate water and some people don't like water, I find that, like sparkling waters that have some flavoring in them can be a good option. I am not a real big fan of a lot of artificial sweeteners, so going from sugar-sweetened things to a lot of artificial sweeteners is not a big recommendation, but if it helps to slowly get people off of a lot of sugar, I guess that's a strategy. I hope that answered the question.

Christina Piechoski:

Absolutely! And who doesn't love chocolate chip pancakes? I don't see any other questions in the box, so I would like to just give you your opportunity for closing comments or final statements for today.

Maria McConville:

I just want to thank everybody who took the opportunity to listen in today. I know that eating healthy as a family is not always easy with all of the obligations that we have, but I do encourage you. There's no such thing as perfection. I encourage you just to start small and any little goals that you can set and any progress that you can make is better than nothing. And, you know, meal planning, meal prepping, take advantage of all the tools that we have through our devices and just spend the time just connecting, even if you don't have a family, but you've got friends, and now with our COVID hopefully being managed better when the restrictions allow for us to be able to gather together and share a meal, we know the importance of that. We've seen that in the last year, how much we need social connection. A meal doesn't have to be perfect, but just taking the time to sit down together and focusing on being mindful of your food choices and how it nourishes your body will take you a long way.

Christina Piechoski:



Awesome! Well, I would like to thank you for sharing your invaluable experience and expertise today. I would also like to thank all of our attendees for participating in today's webinar. And if you find yourself having any questions after the webinar is over, you can email us at

MOSwebinars@militaryonesource.com, and we can send them over to the presenter for answers.

So again, thank you to everyone, and this concludes today's webinar, The Secret ingredients of Family Nutrition. Thank you!

