myHealth CONNECTIONS
PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

ignites Wellness Wednesdays

MARCH, 2025 WEEK 1

FRESH FLAVORS, FRESH START:

Season's Eatings

As winter fades and spring arrives, you might notice the produce aisles beginning to overflow with fresher options. Eating with the season makes meals more flavorful and boosts your health and immunity. Seasonal fruits and vegetables are at their peak in nutrients, freshness, and affordability, making them a great addition to any meal plan.

Increasing the consumption of whole foods and reducing processed options fuels the body with vitamins and minerals required for energy, digestion, and overall wellness. Seasonal produce is also rich in probiotics, the foundation for optimal gut health.

Nutrient rich:
Fruits and vegetables lose nutrients the longer they are stored. Seasonal produce is fresher and retains more vitamins and minerals.

Local Business Enterprise:
Buying seasonal produce from local markets or grocery stores helps support sustainable farming and reduces environmental impact.

Flavor profile:
Seasonal produce tastes better. In-season foods are naturally ripened and picked at their peak, making them more flavorful and enjoyable. Say no more!

Economical:
Since these foods are more abundant, they are often less expensive than out-of-season produce.

Choosing in-season produce is a win-win for your health, your wallet, your neighbors, and the environment!

FOLLOW THE MOUSE:
We've hyperlinked resources you may want to access. Just hover and click!

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SPRING'S NUTRIENT-DENSE SUPERFOODS

Now that we know the benefits of eating seasonally, how do we know what is actually in season? These are some of the fruits and veggies to look out for at the supermarket or farm stand this spring:

- **Asparagus:** Rich in fiber, folate, and vitamins A, C, and K. Roast or steam it for a quick side dish.
- **Strawberries:** Packed with antioxidants and vitamin C to support immunity and skin health. Add them to yogurt or oatmeal.
- **Spinach:** A powerhouse of iron and magnesium. Use it in smoothies, salads, or sautéed as a side.
- **Radishes:** High in fiber and antioxidants, great for digestion and detoxification. Slice them into salads for a peppery crunch.
- **Artichokes:** Known for aiding digestion and liver health. Steam and dip in a light vinaigrette.

For additional information about nutrition at all stages of life, check out this BCBSIL Connect Community article: **'How to Get the Right Nutrients at Any Age'.**

PROMOTING GUT HEALTH WITH PROBIOTIC FOODS

Planning meals in advance makes it easier to stick to healthy eating habits. A simple way to start is by choosing a few staple spring ingredients weekly and creating meals around them. Consider roasting vegetables, preparing salads and incorporating various proteins throughout the week.

Probiotics are also a key part of a well-balanced diet, helping to maintain gut health, which supports digestion, immunity, and even mood. Foods rich in probiotics include:

- **Greek Yogurt:** A versatile addition to breakfast or snacks.
- **Kimchi & Sauerkraut:** Fermented vegetables that enhance gut bacteria.
- **Miso & Tempeh:** Plant-based sources of probiotics great for soups and stir-fries.

COLORFUL RECIPES TO BRIGHTEN YOUR PLATE

Spring Strawberry Spinach Salad

Packed with antioxidants, fiber, and healthy fats, this salad is both refreshing and nutritious.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups fresh spinach
- 1 cup sliced strawberries
- ¼ cup crumbled feta cheese
- ¼ cup sliced almonds
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 teaspoon honey

Instructions:

1. In a large bowl, combine spinach, strawberries, feta, and almonds.
2. In a small bowl, whisk together balsamic vinegar, olive oil, and honey.
3. Drizzle dressing over salad, toss gently, and serve.

One Pot Lemon Chicken Thighs, Artichokes, Green Beans and Orzo

A simple side dish inspired by the Mediterranean diet, packed with protein.

Ingredients:

- ¼ cup canola oil (Healthy tip: you can swap out for olive or avocado oil!)
- 1 pound, 12 ounces boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- 2 cups dry orzo
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic
- 1 quart chicken broth
- 1 pound green beans
- 1 cup canned artichoke hearts, quartered
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- ½ cup freshly chopped parsley
- 1 lemon, cut into wedges

Instructions:

1. In a Dutch oven, heat oil. Sear chicken thighs until golden brown on both sides.
2. Stir in orzo and garlic with chicken. Allow orzo to toast slightly.
3. Stir chicken broth into pot. Bring up to a simmer. Use a wooden spoon to stir scraping the bottom of the pot so that orzo does not stick.
4. Once liquid is about half absorbed, stir green beans into orzo.
5. Cook until green beans are tender and liquid is absorbed. Continue stirring frequently. Orzo is more likely to stick to pot as more liquid is absorbed.
6. Stir artichokes into orzo mixture, cook until heated through.
7. Remove from heat, stir in salt, pepper, lemon juice, and parsley.
8. Serve each portion with a lemon wedge.

There's more where that came from. Click here to learn more about how the Mediterranean diet supports heart health and why people might live longer in that part of the world.

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BETTER NUTRITION IS WITHIN YOUR REACH

By incorporating seasonal produce, meal planning, and probiotics, you can revitalize your diet and boost your overall health.

Want even more recipes and a resource to help you discover what nutrition options work best for you? Revisit the March 2024 Wellness Wednesday edition, **'Find Food That F.I.T.S!'**.

Take advantage of the season's fresh flavors and make healthy eating an enjoyable part of your daily routine!

A HEALTHY BUDGET-FRIENDLY BUGGY!

Here are some 8 practical shopping tips to help you stay on budget without sacrificing your health.

1. Make A List
Use your grocery list when you're shopping. Shop the perimeter of the store first, since this is where the whole foods are generally located.

2. Don't Shop When Hungry
Shopping while you're hungry can lead to impulsive buying. If you're hungry, have a snack before you go grocery shopping.

3. Buy Whole Foods
Whole foods are often less expensive than their processed counterparts. You can also buy them in larger quantities. Examples: brown rice, oats, beans, blocks of cheese.

4. Limit Buying Highly Processed Food
Avoid buying highly processed foods. Not only are they expensive, but they also often contain lots of sodium or sugar, with little to no nutritional value. Examples: cookies, crackers, soda.

5. Eat in Season
Produce that's in season is typically cheaper and more nutritious. If you buy too much, freeze the rest or incorporate it into future meal plans.

6. Bulk Maybe Your Best Buy
Many foods are available in bulk for a way lower price. They are kept for a long time in airtight containers and can be used in a variety of nutritious, inexpensive dishes.

7. Clip, Clip, Coupons
Coupons may be a great way to stock up on cleaning products and nutrient-rich foods. Try to limit the coupons that involve processed foods.

8. Try Online Retailers
Online retailers sometimes offer healthy foods for up to 50% cheaper than the supermarket and deliver them to your doorstep.

Found this week's edition of Wellness Wednesdays to be helpful? Spread the word to your colleagues so they too can make healthy eating and nutrition a priority in 2025.

SOURCES: *National Breast Cancer Foundation, Inc.*, *University of Maryland Medical System*, *Healthline*