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Small Changes Can Lead to Healthier Habits

Aunt Cora's fudge! Cousin Joy's peanut brittle! Grandpa Harry's hyper-jalapeno nachos! Food is a big part of our holiday celebrations and we may be wearing it well into the New Year. Even if your New Year's resolutions don't include losing a few pounds, you might want to consider some simple modifications to your eating and lifestyle habits.

The healthcare providers at the Ruby Valley and Twin Bridges Medical Clinics recommend that their patients shift their eating habits toward a Mediterranean style diet. Kathy Tetrault, Physician Assistant, said, "When compared with a low fat or low carb diet, the Mediterranean diet has been shown in studies to result in more weight loss and better long-term weight maintenance." In addition to weight loss benefits, research has associated the Mediterranean diet with reduced incidents of cancer and Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and cardiovascular diseases!

The Mediterranean diet emphasizes eating more fruits, vegetables, whole grain breads and pastas, fish and poultry. Herbs and spices are recommended substitutes for salt. Red meat consumption should be reduced to once a week, or less. Fish should be part of the meal at least twice a week and lake trout is a very healthy choice. Rather than spreading butter on your whole grain bread, try dipping it in olive oil flavored with basil, garlic or red chilies. Tahini, which is made from ground sesame seeds, is also a tasty alternative to butter. The bottom line is to switch to healthier fats, carbs and meats while eating more fruits and vegetables.

What about venison and elk? For many Madison County residents, game meat is a major source of protein but you'll be hard-pressed to find a Mediterranean dish that includes elk steaks or venison burger. Chris Hartsfield, FNP-BC says, "Natural meats like elk and deer are much better than beef that has been raised and treated with antibiotics or steroids. Anything natural or grass fed is much better for you." Natural meats are easily substituted for beef or chicken in many recipes and are very healthy so long as they aren't breaded and fried. It's also important to limit or even omit adding fat when processing your game meat into burger. Kathy Tetrault concurs, "Usually when I talk to patients about this diet, I do recommend leaner red meats like venison, elk and grass fed beef. It is a healthier alternative that is absolutely appropriate for this area."

Kathy also recommends that her patients focus their grocery shopping on the perimeter of the store. "The outer circle of a grocery store is typically where all of the fresher foods are located." Staying on the perimeter of the store makes it easier to avoid the boxed, prepared and junk food located in the center aisles!

Getting enough exercise does not require a gym membership or a big lifestyle change. A reasonable plan consists of 40 minutes of exercise most days of the week. In fact, you don't have to work out for a solid 40 minute set. Kathy advises that you can obtain the "same benefit from 10 minutes of exercise, four times throughout the day. High intensity exercise isn't necessary. Walking is appropriate."

Another healthy habit to cultivate is limiting TV time to less than ten hours per week. This is one of the biggest contributors to inactivity. Recreational computer use also falls into the "TV time" allocation.

To sum up –

- More fruits and vegetables

- Switch to whole grains from processed wheat
- Switch to poultry and fish from red meat
- Elk, venison and grass fed meats are a good substitute for beef
- Switch to olive oil and tahini from butter
- Switch to herbs and spices from salt
- Exercise a total of 40 minutes per day, most days of the week
- Limit recreational screen time (TV and computer) to 10 hours per week.

The Ruby Valley Hospital wishes you a very happy and healthy New Year!

Please see the links below for more information about the Mediterranean diet and other healthy habits discussed in this article.

[Ruby Valley Health Clinics Mediterranean Diet Brochure](#)

[Mediterranean Diet Meal Plan Diagram](#)

[Health Benefits of Eating Wild Game](#)

[Shopping the Perimeter of the Grocery Store](#)

[Reducing Screen Time](#)

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