

## National Nutrition Month: Beyond the Table



March is National Nutrition Month, and this year the theme chosen by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics for the month is “Beyond the Table”. This month we are encouraged to look at choices we make daily about what we eat and drink at our tables, and how these decisions can have a larger impact on our future.

One way we can do this now is to make efforts to reduce food waste. When we waste food, we are also wasting the energy and water it took to grow, harvest, transport, and package it. Also, when food goes to landfills and decomposes it produces methane—a strong greenhouse gas. Decreasing our food waste is a way to positively affect the future health of our planet, and something that everyone can take part in. Included are some strategies that you

may be able to implement into your daily routine to help minimize food waste.

### Plan meals using what you already have

- Before going grocery shopping, take an inventory of what you already have in your pantry, fridge, freezer, and cabinets.
- Make a list of ingredients you need to help keep you on track while at the store, and not buying items you already have.
- For perishable products, make sure you are only getting a quantity that you will be able to eat or freeze within the next few days. Consider creating a designated space in your fridge for foods that you think will be going bad within a few days.

### Understand food product dating

- There are no uniform or universally accepted descriptions used on food labels for the calendar dates applied to foods in the United States. As a result, there are a wide variety of phrases used for product dating.
  - “Best if Used By/Before” date indicates when a product will be of best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
  - “Sell-By” date tells the store how long to display the product for sale for inventory.

- management. It is not a safety date.
- “Use-By” date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. It is not a safety date (except for when used on infant formula).
- If the date passes during home storage, a product may still be safe and wholesome, if it was handled and stored properly, until the time spoilage is evident. Spoiled foods will develop an off odor, flavor, or texture- if a food has developed such spoilage characteristics, it should not be eaten.



## Make leftovers your friend!

- Use your meal leftovers as a topping for salads or cooked grains like rice or pasta.
- Wrap your leftovers in a tortilla or put on bread to make a sandwich.
- Combine leftovers to make a soup.
- Add leftover meats or vegetables into a breakfast frittata or quiche.

- Make croutons out of bread that is going stale.
- Make smoothies out of fruits that are nearing the end of their freshness.
- Or simply eat leftovers as an evening meal later in the week, and bag leftovers for lunches on the go.

## Other ways to watch your waste

- Use the FIFO method (First In, First Out) to organize your pantry
- When eating out, make sure you ask for a to-go box to bring home any leftovers. If you can't bring extra food home, stick to ordering a smaller portion that you are able to finish.
- Consider donating food that is still safe to eat to a local food pantry or shelter.
- Canning, pickling, and dehydrating foods are great skills to learn, and a good way to save food from perishing.
- Composting is a natural process for recycling certain food scraps and is good for the environment.

### Would you like to work with a Registered Dietitian?

To schedule an appointment, please obtain a referral for **Medical Nutrition Therapy** and contact:

*Presbyterian: 412-692-4497*

*Shadyside: 412-623-2421*