

Nutrition labels tell it all

Moving Grays Harbor
By Maryann Welch

Well, another week older and another week wiser! When my husband Jim and I were skiing in Colorado recently we discovered, in dramatic fashion, that Jim needed a stent in one of his coronary arteries. While he was convalescing, a dietician paid us a visit and went over what we should start paying attention to when it comes to nutrition labeling. I thought I knew quite a bit about nutrition and what was good, bad and ugly, but looking at labels now is certainly a bit different. In the past, if I read labels, it was a quick glance at calories. Now, I'm standing in the store aisles trying to decipher different fat values and sodium as well. Seems easier to just stick to fruits and vegetables! It dawned on me that there are many different dietary needs and restrictions that people face each day and learning to read labels is no easy task.

I was talking to a friend recently who said that she had sat in on a class that went over some basic nutrition label education and what to look for. She shared that Trisha Lecomte facilitated this class and as it turns out, Trisha is connected to the YMCA's Biggest Loser program. I wanted to find out more about what Trisha was offering as I feel education is a great tool.

In talking to Trisha I found out that she has a deep commitment to nutrition and although she does not have a traditional degree yet (she is pursuing her BA degree) she is very knowledgeable. She shared that her husband of 10 years, Norm, has a doctorate in food science and nutrition

and used to teach at Kansas State University. Before she met her husband, Trisha thought she had a fairly healthy diet, but much has changed since then. She says that the biggest change is that she has not eaten at a McDonalds in 10 years and with children I can imagine that this is no easy feat. Trisha agrees and laments that the society we live in does not promote good nutrition as a whole and claims that science is proving that the simpler our diet is (cutting out all the preservatives, chemicals and other additives) the healthier we are. One of her biggest pet peeves is that we tend to use junk food as a reward – especially with children and this is just continuing to reinforce bad eating habits.

“Most people think that eating healthy is expensive” Trisha remarks, “but, for example, if you look at the cost per ounce of a bag of potato chips versus a bag of potatoes you can see that this is a misconception.”

Another thing that Trisha advocates is eating organic as much as possible. She indicates that she and her family order organic produce in bulk from Jays Farm Stand (which will have a dedicated organic section soon) and split it amongst themselves – an option I had never considered. “Most foods on the grocery shelves are filled with pesticides and herbicides and the closer you can get to eating organic the healthier you will be.”

Along with her love of nutrition, Trisha also has a passion for Bible Principles and bases her diet and her teachings on the Bible stating that “there are three aspects to health...body, mind and spirit and they all need to be nurtured in order to achieve overall health.” In addition to helping with the Biggest Loser Program, Trisha also offers a similar nutrition class on the

first Sunday of every month from 4-5:15 at Promise Day Care in Aberdeen which is open to anyone who wants to learn more.

Yes, nutrition can be very confusing and overwhelming and I empathize with everyone who finds that it is just easier to not think about it. However, a notion that Trisha and I both agree on is “you either pay now or pay later”. And paying later is never easier when your health is concerned.

If you have been considering a nutrition overhaul and don't know where to start, talk to your health care provider. They should be able to point you in the direction of a plan that would be best for you and your personal dietary needs. Above all else, seek medically accurate information as opposed to anecdotal tales and fad diets.

I know I will be looking at labels through new eyes now...not quite the recreational reading I had envisioned in retirement, but knowledge is power and I will continue to seek both and encourage you to do the same.

Maryann Welch is the recently retired director of Grays Harbor County's Public Health and Social Services Department.

If you have questions about becoming more active or have information about free or low-cost activity in the area, contact the health department at 532-8665 ext. 483, e-mail us at moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us or visit our web site at www.ghphss.org.