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It's about health and wellness: Tips to stay healthy as we approach a new year

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To say 2020 was an exceptional year, and generally not in a good way, would be an overstatement of the obvious.

With everything that is going on around us, and in the world, some may think this is a good time to let something as simple as nutrition go by the wayside. After all, who wants to think about fruits and vegetables when you're not even sure you can get fruits and vegetables to feed your family, let alone anything else? However, don't give into the temptation to let your health goals slide.

Some people think eating a healthy diet of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and low-fat dairy products is complicated and expensive. It is neither. Menu planning, buying items on sale, making good use of what you already have in your pantry, and buying in season

as much as possible are key things to have in your tool chest of options for continuing to eat a healthy diet. And remember, fruits and vegetables do not have to always be fresh for you to benefit from their nutritional value. Fruits and vegetables in all forms, canned, frozen, dried or as 100% juice, all count.

Having a strong immune system, which is important as we enter the height of the flu season and as we continue to deal with the stresses of daily life, will help to keep you and your family healthy.

Although it is an old adage, it is true that “you are what you eat.” Eating a diet of food full of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients will go a long way to helping you feel well and able to cope. For more information on nutrition, or for recipes, contact your local Extension Service office or look on the Oregon State University website, www.foodhero.org.

Just as important as nutrition is its partner: physical activity. Even though it may be a typical winter in Northeast Oregon (which generally means alternating between cold and wet) it is still possible to be physically active. Walking is an activity most people can do and benefit from doing on a regular basis. If you prefer to be physically active indoors, there are a number of exercise programs that can be found on YouTube or public broadcasting stations.

Physical activity is also important to maintaining good mental health. Along with the weather, isolation and uncertainty about the future can contribute to depression and anxiety. If you are prone to Seasonal Affective Disorder (a type of depression) then you know this all too well. Fresh air and connecting (physically distanced, of course) with nature and others will help give one a sense of purpose and the knowledge we are still in this together, and together we will be OK, whatever comes our way. Walking with a companion (using a mask, of course) is particularly beneficial to feeling connected, and reduces feelings of isolation. However, if your feelings of depression do not subside, do not hesitate to seek the advice and consult of your primary care provider. Depression is a serious condition and should not be ignored.

Finally, get enough sleep. Along with nutrition and physical activity, it is your best source of immune protection. Sleep helps with cell regeneration and is essential for good health. —

As 2021 dawns, let's all pledge to make our health and wellness goals a reality, and a priority. Best wishes for a safe and healthy new year.

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