WLG 105

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EXTENSION SERVICE

Eating Outside of Your Comfort Zone?

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Educational Objectives

1. Learn how to get out of your food rut.
2. Make a plan to eat adventurously.
3. Learn about new foods to try.

We all get in a rut and find ourselves purchasing and eating the same food repeatedly. For example, there are only a few ways that you can change chicken – the bottom line is it's still chicken. Grocery stores are full of a wide variety of fruits, grains, vegetables and meats that most of us have never seen nor have we tried. Instead of thinking about buying the same thing constantly, look at grocery aisles as a new horizon with new foods to discover and explore. We often eat the same things because we know what we like and we ask ourselves: What if I don't like it? The question we need to ask is: What if I do like it?

Change of any kind can be hard, even more so with food. Food is expensive, and we want to use our food dollars wisely. We want to buy and eat what we know our family will like. What you ate as a child also contributes to your food rut. Were your parents adventurous eaters or were they more the meat and potatoes kind of people? We eat what we know – what is familiar. As parents we tend to create a bias for our kids. If we don't like a particular food, then we don't prepare it and the child grows up thinking they don't like it. Parents have a huge influence on their kids. Try to be food neutral. Expose them to different things and don't refer to food as "nasty" or "yucky" because they will see it that way as well. Encourage them to try it. Before they can rule a food out as like or dislike, they need to at least try it a couple of times. There are many things that you think you don't like because of the way it was prepared, but if you tried it again prepared

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in a different way, then you may find that you really like it. Being adventurous is the key. After all, variety is the spice of life.

Make a Plan

The first step is to start slowly – don't go in the store and purchase all new foods. You and your family will go into shock with overload. Start slowly, maybe try something new every month, every two weeks or even every week. Make a plan to try something new. One week you may decide to try a new vegetable, the next week a grain and the next a different protein. Research the internet or look through a cookbook and find a recipe that utilizes that new food. You can find recipes for just about anything you want to cook. Prepare it and determine if it will go in your hit or miss file. Some recipes you will like and some not so much, but you'll never know until you give it a try.

Activity: Ask friends and family members what foods they like. We all have that friend that likes everything and will try anything. Find out what they have tried and like – you might like it too!

Activity: When at a restaurant, instead of ordering the same chicken fingers and fries you always get, try something new. Look on the menu and find a dish you've never had before and order that. You might love it, and if you don't some restaurants will let you switch it out for something else.

Grains

There are lots of grains that are really good and versatile. Here are some you might incorporate into your diet:

- Quinoa (pronounced keen-wah) is a relative of beets and Swiss chard and not a true grain. It is cooked in about 10 to 12 minutes and is wonderful in salads or as a rice-substitute side dish. It also can be incorporated into soups and baked goods. It is a small, light-colored, round grain but also comes in other colors such as red, purple and black. The bonus with quinoa is the abundant protein found in the grain. It alone contains all the essential amino acids our bodies can't make on their own.
- Amaranth (pronounced am-uh-ranth) is another pseudo-grain like quinoa. It is listed as a grain because of its nutritional profile and similar uses as true grains. It has small kernels when cooked. It is a gluten-free food and is often used in cereals, breads, muffins and pancakes. The health bonus is the high level of protein. The protein contains Lysine, an amino acid missing or negligible in many grains.
- Freekeh (pronounced free-kah) is a hard wheat that is harvested when the plant is still young and green. After harvest it is rubbed and roasted, which gives the freekeh the smoky flavor. It is similar to bulgur wheat and is often sold cracked into smaller

quick-cooking pieces. This quick-cooking wheat is great in savory salads or as a delicious porridge.

- Barley is one of the oldest cultivated grains. Barley has a tough hull and is difficult to remove without losing some of the grain. However, you can purchase hulled barley as well as lightly pearled barley. It is full of fiber and much healthier than a refined grain. Because of the fiber in barley, it may lower your cholesterol more effectively than oat flour. It is typically used in salads, soups, risotto and breads.

Vegetables

There are so many different and versatile vegetables on the market today. Check your local grocer or enjoy the wonderful bounty that is often available at your local farmers market. There's no reason to eat the same green beans and iceberg lettuce salads. Here are some unique veggies to try:

- Chayote (pronounced chi-yo-tay) is a squash that is also known as a vegetable pear because of its pear shape and green color. The taste is a cross between a zucchini and a cucumber. Chayote is available all year-round. They are good roasted, grilled, baked or grated into a salad.

- Fennel is a very versatile vegetable that has a licorice or anise flavor, particularly when eaten raw; it has a much milder flavor when cooked. The fennel plant is composed of the bulb that is typically green or white with a stalk of feathery green leaves. The stalk, bulb and leaves are all edible. Fennel can be eaten raw, roasted or stir-fried.
- Jicama (pronounced hick-a-mah) is a tuber with a bark-like skin over it that must be peeled. Jicama is very crunchy, sweet and juicy – sometimes described as a savory apple. It is most commonly eaten raw, but it can be cooked for short periods of time to retain its crispness. Jicama is usually found in salads, shredded in slaw, added to salsa for crunch and also incorporated into stir-fries.

- Tomatillo (pronounced toh-muh-tee-oh) is also called the tomato verde, which means green tomato. A staple in Mexican cooking, the tomatillo is grown everywhere in the western hemisphere, particularly in Texas. Tomatillos are green and about the size of a large cherry tomato with a white flesh. It has a much meatier texture than a regular tomato. They are grown inside a papery husk that can be green or brown-looking. This husk is inedible and must be removed prior to eating. Usually the smaller the tomatillo, the sweeter the taste, although the taste can be inconsistent among tomatillo – some being pretty sweet to being very tart. They can be eaten raw, cooked or roasted. You will find them in dishes from enchiladas to salsa verde.

Meats

Like vegetables, there are many different types of meat available in today's market. Here are some meats you may not have previously considered:

- Lamb, hogget and mutton are the meat of domestic sheep at different stages of their life. Typically, sheep in their first year are called lamb. When buying lamb, try to stick with organic or grass fed. It is common to find lamb on the Mediterranean diet. It can be prepared several different ways from putting in a stew to braising or roasting.
- Veal is the meat of calves as opposed to beef, which is the meat of older cattle. Veal can come from either gender but is usually from young male dairy cattle. It has the same nutrients, vitamins and minerals as beef.

Remember, we eat with our eyes first; the food must look appealing. It if looks good, we are more likely to try something different. So, challenge your food rut and see what new and exciting dishes you can add to your culinary repertoire.

Activity: Provide pictures of different foods. See how many participants can identify the foods and ask how many they have tried before. Challenge each member to pick something new and prepare it. Report back to the group at the next meeting.

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