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SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF ARMSTRONG AND INDIANA COUNTIES

welcome

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Spring has sprung, and so has the spring 2011 issue of *Community Health* magazine! This publication is an excellent example of what can happen when people work together, and share their knowledge and experiences in an effort to support one another.

Community Health is a product of the ongoing collaborative spirit that defines the school districts of Armstrong and Indiana counties and the region's local businesses. It is through this cooperative spirit—and the talents and resources of many caring people—that we are able to share these stories and make a positive difference in the lives of local families, students and employees.

And everyone seems to have a story to share. In this issue, one Apollo-Ridge School District employee tells a personal story about how bariatric surgery changed her life for the better. The Armstrong School District also shows how they are promoting wellness by implementing a grant that focuses on nutrition and activity. And several employees from the Leechburg, Penns Manor, United and Purchase Line school districts share their creative ideas for implementing fitness programs into the daily routines of

students and staff.

All of these ideas are made available to you through the financial support of the region's businesses, who believe in and support this magazine.

As the warmer spring weather coaxes us out of our winter slumber and outdoors for more activity, we encourage you to start focusing more on your health. You can even use some of the ideas from this issue to get you started. When you have your health, you have more time with the people who matter most to you in life.

In the spirit of collaboration, we encourage you to be inspired by the ideas in this edition. Help us keep the momentum going by sharing your own health and wellness stories at editor@cmghealth.net. Together, we can make a healthy difference in one another's lives.

We hope you enjoy this issue!



MARGARET (PEGGY) DININNO
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Living— Not Just Existing

A first-person look at one woman's weight loss journey BY CAROL RODNICKI

My journey, and the beginning of my new life, began on May 27, 2009, when Dr. Anita Courcoulas performed gastric bypass surgery on me. The decision to have gastric bypass surgery was not an easy one because it required not only a major life change, but also a commitment to continued healthy living and positive choices.

I gave this decision a lot of thought and prayer. Although many people think bariatric surgery is the final solution, it's actually just the first step in a long process. I had to make a commitment to myself to combine the surgery with a lifetime of exercise and healthy eating.

With more than 100 pounds to lose, I was always tired and my body always ached. Luckily, I did not have diabetes, high blood pressure or other health problems, but I knew that if I didn't make a weight change, these issues would soon become a part of my life.

I also wanted to have the surgery because I was tired of missing out on living life to its fullest because of my weight problem. I rarely went out to socialize because I felt too big, so I spent a lot of my time in front of the TV, or visiting with friends and family who I knew loved me no matter how I looked.

Once I made the decision to get help, Courcoulas and her staff were amazing. They explained every detail concerning



the surgery with expertise and compassion. They understand what you are going through, and they really want to help. The six-month pre-surgery program was essential because it gave me the education I needed to make proper food choices for my new life.

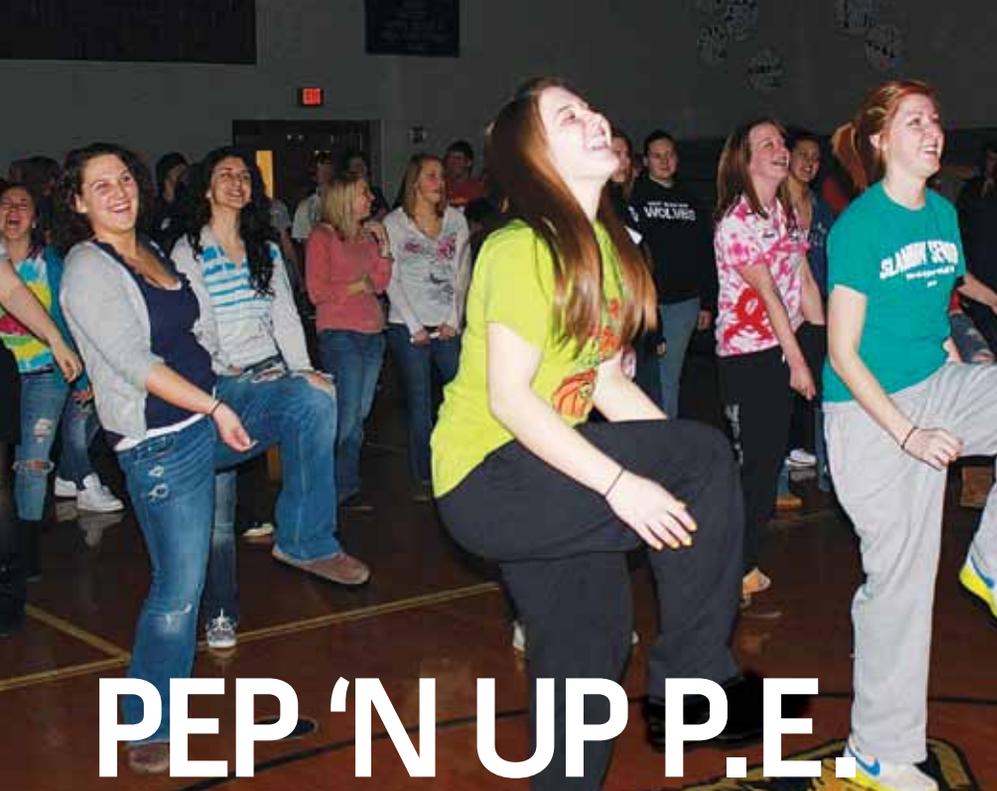
Today, I have lost 160 pounds, and for the first time in many years, I am truly living. I go dancing every weekend. I swim—I even feel comfortable putting on a swimsuit. I exercise and walk every day, and actually enjoy it. For the first time in many years, I rode the rides at Kennywood, and I flew on an airplane. I would have never done that prior to my surgery because I was afraid I wouldn't be able to fit in the seats.

In May 2010, I met a wonderful man named Rick. He knows about my

surgery and is very supportive of my healthy lifestyle. We enjoy walks and go dancing every weekend. On Dec. 11, 2010, Rick and I became engaged, and we are planning a Dec. 10, 2011 wedding.

If you struggle with weight like I did, please give bariatric bypass surgery some consideration. It requires a lifetime commitment to healthy living, but the changes are well worth the effort. The expertise of Courcoulas, her staff and Magees Hospital will provide you with one part of this life change—the rest is up to you.

Gastric bypass surgery was a decision I took very seriously, and it helped give me the healthy life I always hoped for. Before the surgery, I was only existing. Now I am truly living.



PEP 'N UP P.E.

Thanks to a PEP grant, the Armstrong School District is making some healthy changes

BY DEVIN LORIGAN, ARMSTRONG SCHOOL DISTRICT WELLNESS COORDINATOR

While P.E. class is fighting to stay relevant in many districts, HEALTHY Armstrong, which stands for Healthy Eating Active Lifestyles Together Helping Youth, has partnered with the Armstrong School District to augment the P.E. experience for local secondary students.

In July 2010, HEALTHY Armstrong and the ACMH Foundation applied to the Carol M. White Physical Education Program for nearly one million dollars in funds. In September 2010, they were awarded the grant.

"It was an amazing feeling to receive notification saying that we received this grant," says Kay Owen, project director of HEALTHY Armstrong. "All the hard work of the ASD Health and P.E. teachers paid off."

The Carol M. White Physical Education Program provides funds to local educational agencies and community-based organizations to initiate, expand and improve physical education programs for students. The PEP grant provides ASD secondary schools with money for staff training, equipment, fitness opportunities and nutritional education.

And the money is already being put to good use in those areas.

STAFF TRAINING

Four physical education teachers recently attended the Pennsylvania State Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance Convention at Seven Springs Mountain Resort in Seven Springs, Pa., where they learned new strategies for improving their P.E. programs. Eleven P.E. teachers also attended the PE4life training at Titusville, Penn.

"We learned how to make a good P.E. program great," says Jocelyn Shoop, a P.E. teacher at Ford City High School.

Five other P.E. teachers attended the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance National Convention in San Diego, once again bringing back new information and great ideas to improve district P.E. programs.

EQUIPMENT

Thanks to the PEP grant, the ASD will soon be purchasing P.E. Assessment software that will allow the district to

standardize fitness assessment policies and procedures, track data, and use that data for program and student improvement.

In the near future, students will also be able to monitor their personal activity levels during P.E. time with heart rate monitors. Currently, P.E. teachers and students are very busy tracking their steps with pedometers for seven-day activity periods, and reporting on their eating habits and exercise patterns.

One of the goals of this grant is to expose students to various outdoor activities and adventures they can enjoy for a lifetime. Additional equipment purchases will include mountain bikes and helmets, yoga packs, and rock climbing walls.

FITNESS TRAINING

The YMCA has partnered with the ASD and HEALTHY Armstrong to provide a free after-school exercise program two times a week at the secondary school buildings. Certified fitness instructors use activities such as body combat, yoga, games, circuit training and boot camp to help participants get in shape.

Jeremy Yackmack, an eighth grader from Kittanning Junior High School, has attended all of the after-school activities so far.

"It is so much fun," Yackmack says. "I have told everybody about it. I leave sweating and loving it!"

NUTRITIONAL EDUCATION

The dietetic interns in the food and nutrition services department from Indiana University have created three health class presentations for students: "Eat Breakfast to Get an A," "Healthy Menu Choices" and "A Healthy You."

Health teachers can schedule the interns for in-class and after-school presentations. The food and nutrition services department has also created displays about various nutrition topics that are posted in the cafeterias of the secondary buildings.

A Hop, Skip and a Big Jump

Children jump rope to raise funds—and heart rates

BY SIGRID LUPIERI

A late season snowstorm couldn't stop 460 students from Homer-Center Elementary in Homer City from jumping rope for a good cause in early March. The school's pre-kindergarten through sixth grade children practiced their skipping skills to raise funds for the American Heart Association as part of the organization's Jump Rope for Heart event.

Jump Rope for Heart, which began in Wisconsin more than three decades ago, invites kindergarten through eighth grade students across the nation to jump rope and collect donations for the AHA. About 29,000 schools—or almost one-third of all elementary and middle schools in the U.S.—now take part in the event. While children manage to raise an average of \$64 million a year, the program doesn't just benefit the AHA.

"[The event] teaches children the importance of physical activity and of community service," says Suzie Upton, chief development officer at the AHA. "It helps them understand the value of being part of something larger."

Scott Bauer, a physical education teacher at Homer-Center Elementary, says jumping rope helps increase coordination skills and cardiovascular endurance. And, most importantly, the children enjoy it.

"The kids come in and jump to see how many jumps they can do in a minute," Bauer says.

In order to challenge the students, Bauer introduced a jump rope competition. Children who can jump more than 100 times in 60 seconds receive a gold medal, kids who manage 50 jumps a minute get a silver medal, and kids who complete 25 jumps get a bronze medal.



Bauer then displays the results on a chart.

"We give every kid a chance to get on the chart," he says. "It's something they can be proud of."

The students and staff at Homer-Center Elementary are also proud of the contributions they have made to the AHA. Over the past three years, the school has raised about \$20,000.

"We ask [students] whatever they can give, even if it's a dollar," Bauer says. "The kids are so proud of their envelopes when they come in. It's really about kids helping other kids."

According to Tagni McRae, spokeswoman for the AHA, funds raised from the Jump Rope for Heart event support research, professional education for cardiologists, scientific meetings and public education.

In an attempt to reduce childhood obesity, which affects as many as 19.6 percent of children between the ages of

6 and 11, the AHA also returns a portion of the proceeds to the schools in the form of gift certificates. Schools can then use these certificates to purchase physical education equipment for their students.

"We want to make sure we are leaving a good legacy behind us," Upton says.

But raising money and getting exercise are only part of the program at Homer-Center Elementary. The week-long Jump Rope for Heart event is also an opportunity to learn more about heart disease and honor loved ones who may be struggling with heart conditions. Every year, Bauer asks students to decorate the walls with colorful hearts adorned with the names of people they would like to jump for.

"For the most part, they [jump] for grandpa or grandma, or someone who has a heart problem," Scott says. "In the end, there is a great wall covered with hearts."

Teach, Stretch, Exercise

An after-school program is making it easier than ever for Leechburg staff to stay healthy BY PATRICIA CAMP

The staff of the Leechburg Area School District is doing much more than just teaching and working with students these days. With the help of Carrie Davies, a certified fitness instructor, they're also getting in shape. After students have headed home for the day on Mondays and Wednesdays,

interested staff members meet in the David Leech Elementary multi-purpose room for an hour-long fitness and exercise program.

There are currently 12 participants in this rigorous and exuberant class, which includes stretching, fast-beat music, dance aerobics, circuits and a healthy dose of cardiovascular exercise. After worrying about students all day, this is an opportunity for staff members to work their entire bodies, relieve stress and feel good about themselves. Davies provides an energetic workout with clear instructions and offers modifications for all activity levels.

According to various participants, Davies is very professional and motivational, and inspires people in a positive and dynamic way. They say they look forward to the program each week and truly enjoy it. It's an added benefit that the workout is held immediately following

school because participants can work and exercise in the same building, eliminating the need to return home and go out again later in the evening.

But there are other benefits to the class. Studies have shown that people are more likely to stick with an exercise routine when they work out with a group or a partner. It's much easier to give up a routine or skip a workout when you're at home by yourself. Many of the participants agree that if the class wasn't offered at the place where they work, they wouldn't be as apt to exercise on their own.

I personally would like to give this group the utmost respect and credit for participating in this strenuous class. It is a truly heart-pounding workout after a long day of teaching and working in the schools. This exercise program is a wonderful way for teachers and staff to achieve better health and wellness, while having fun in the process.

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THE ROAD TO GOLD

Josh Wirt shares his story of perseverance at United Elementary's 'U' Expo

BY SIGRID LUPIERI

When 9-year-old Josh Wirt lost the use of his legs in a car accident, he feared he would never play sports again. But less than a decade later, he was proudly clutching a sled hockey gold medal at the 2002 Paralympic Games in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The road to becoming the youngest sled hockey player on the Paralympic team, however, was far from easy. For years after the accident, which occurred during the summer between third and fourth grade, Wirt missed athletics more than anything.

"I was down because I couldn't play sports, which was such a big part of my life," he says.

But when a nurse at a children's hospital introduced him to sled hockey at age 13, he embraced the opportunity and took to the sport quickly. With a specially designed sled, two hockey sticks and a metal pick to help push off the ice, Wirt and his teammates could play once again.

"It boosted my confidence," Wirt says. "I wasn't the same person as I was before."

From there, things moved fast for Wirt. A year later, he travelled to Canada for a tournament at which a U.S. national team coach spotted his talent and recruited him. In 2000, he played in the Sled Hockey World Cup. Shortly thereafter, he decided to try out for the Paralympics, and at only 17 years of age, he became the youngest member of the Paralympic sled hockey team.

Now 26, Wirt has a degree in com-



"We want to get the message to students that we care about every one of them. We want them to be successful in their lives."

munications and is attending classes to become a real estate agent. But he hasn't forgotten that with a little work, you can accomplish anything, and he's sharing that message with others. On February 18, he returned to his former school, United Elementary in Armagh, Penn., to speak to students about his personal experience and the value of perseverance at a yearly event called "U" Expo.

The event, which is geared toward fifth and sixth graders, addresses the importance of making good choices in life, and encourages each student to become the best person he or she can be.

"We want to get the message to students that we care about every one of them," says guidance counselor Christin Hagens. "We want them to be successful in their lives."

Hagens says she invited Wirt as the keynote speaker for the "U" Expo because of his incredible story and

his history of overcoming adversity.

"Sometimes we think our life will go one way, but it goes another," she says, "But we keep going and don't give up."

Though nine years have passed since he won the gold medal, Wirt says the moment is still indescribable. But that doesn't mean he's resting on his laurels. He plans on trying out for the 2014 Paralympic Games and trains almost every day by skating with his sled, playing on a sled hockey team and lifting weights. He also pushes his wheelchair at a running pace for three to four miles a day.

Wirt has come a long way since the days when he believed he would never be able to play sports again. And he has never lost hope for the future.

"If you have a dream, you should go for it," he says. "If you're willing to work for it, you can achieve anything."

Get *Up* and Get *Moving*

Purchase Line elementary students start the day the healthy way

BY DR. SUSAN M. SIBERT, DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM AND FEDERAL PROGRAMS

When you think back to morning announcements from your school days, it probably conjures memories of nasal-toned public address announcers barking schedule adjustments and menu changes as sleepy-eyed students struggle to listen and stay awake. But at Purchase Line elementary schools, morning announcements are anything but mundane.

In addition to the usual good morning, Pledge of Allegiance and thought for the day, students actually kick off each school day by exercising together as part of the “Get Up and Get Moving” program.

Music infiltrates every hallway, classroom and office as energetic elementary students jump to their feet at the urging of physical education teacher Julie Horner.

“Good Morning. It’s exercise time. Everyone get up!”

Along with her student helpers, Horner calls the kids to attention five days a week, 180 days a year for a 10-minute, school-wide, simultaneous group exercise program.

Horner came up with the idea after reading about Project ACES (All Children Exercise Simultaneously), a signature program of the Youth Fitness Coalition, which aims to motivate children to exercise. Project ACES takes place on the first Wednesday of each year as part of National Physical Fitness and Sports Month in conjunction with National Physical Education Week.



“I thought it was a great idea to try at Purchase Line, so I ran it by Mrs. Carol Putt-Ayers, our principal,” Horner says. “That was about five years ago. The response from teachers and students was overwhelming.”

But Putt-Ayers had an idea to take it one step further. She asked Horner to implement the program daily.

“With child obesity on the rise, I wanted to encourage students to get moving every day, hence the ‘Get Up and Get Moving’ exercise program began,” Putt-Ayers says.

The school community quickly accepted the daily exercise routine. In fact, it has become a highlight of the school day. Horner says faculty and staff participate right along with students and believe it is a great energizer for the academic curriculum.

People soon started requesting certain songs, and students got involved, getting on the microphone in the morning to call out exercises alongside their P.E. teacher. Students in grades three through six can now sign up to take a turn at the microphone.

Horner varies the exercises and has creatively named them to appeal to youngsters. For example, the pupils know ankle rotations as Squish the Bug and one leg quad stretches as the Pink Flamingo. Other calisthenics include arm circles, shoulder rolls, trunk twisters, jogging in place, wrist rolls and jumping jacks.

In addition to the physical exercise portion of the routine, Horner also stresses health education, which she calls Fun Facts on Fitness.

“The exercises are simple, and along with them we give little tips,” she explains. “For instance, I told the students one morning, ‘Did you know the heart pumps blood around the body?’”

Some teachers add their own academic twist on the proceedings. Sue Lieb, a kindergarten teacher at South Elementary School, has the students use their counting skills to count by ones or fives during jumping jacks.

“You can hear students counting off 20 jumping jacks with their teachers leading them,” Putt-Ayers says. “Simply put, it’s a great way to keep students active and healthy.”



MANAGE BLOOD PRESSURE:

High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, occurs when blood flows with too much force and puts pressure on your arteries. Your body then kicks into injury-healing mode and creates scar tissue. Unfortunately, the scar tissue traps plaque and white blood cells, which can form into blockages, blood clots, and hardened, weakened arteries. A normal blood pressure is 120mmHg/80mmHg or less.

CONTROL BLOOD SUGAR:

The American Heart Association considers diabetes one of the six major controllable risk factors for cardiovascular disease. In fact, adults with diabetes are two to four times more likely to have heart disease or stroke. Normal blood sugar is 70mg/dl to 110mg/dl.

MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT:

Obesity is now recognized as a major, independent risk factor for cardiovascular disease. If you have too much fat, you're at a higher risk for several health problems, including high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and diabetes. You can reduce your risk for cardiovascular disease by successfully losing weight and keeping it off. A BMI of between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight. A BMI of 30 or higher indicates obesity.

GET ACTIVE AND STAY ACTIVE:

Regular physical activity helps lower blood pressure, increase HDL (or good) cholesterol, control blood sugar, reduce feelings of stress, control body weight, and improve self-esteem. Aerobic exercises, such as walking, jogging, swimming or biking, benefit your heart. Strength and stretching exercises are best for overall stamina and flexibility.

Shelley Lockard is a registered nurse and the HeartCaring coordinator at Indiana Regional Medical Center. The Institute for Healthy Living at IRMC offers a variety of free classes to Highmark members. To view a list of classes or register, go to www.indianarmc.org or call (724) 357-8088.

Rainbow of Health

Understanding the components of a healthy lifestyle will help you make better decisions BY SHELLEY LOCKARD

There are two basic components to achieving a true “Rainbow of Health: health behaviors and health factors. Ideal health behaviors include eliminating tobacco, improving diet, maintaining a healthy weight and getting active. Ideal health factors include managing your blood pressure, controlling your blood sugar and knowing your numbers—and preferably keeping them all in check without the need of medication.

Making modest lifestyle or behavioral changes can improve your health and prevent any serious health risks. But you need to know what to watch out for. An estimated 79 million Americans don't even know they have cardiovascular disease, which is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the U.S.

If you want to know your risk for cardiovascular diseases and conditions, please visit www.indianarmc.org and

click on one of the HealthAware innovative early detection modules. You will receive a customized report to help you individually modify your lifestyle.

Here's what you need to do to create your own Rainbow of Health.

ELIMINATE TOBACCO: Smoking or chewing tobacco increases your risk of cardiovascular disease, decreases your tolerance for physical activity and increases your risk of blood clots. And your risks increase even more if you have a family history of heart disease. Using tobacco also creates a higher risk for peripheral arterial disease and aortic aneurysm.

IMPROVE YOUR DIET: A healthy diet and lifestyle are your best weapons against cardiovascular disease. To get the nutrients you need, choose vegetables, fruits, whole-grains, and fat-free or low-fat dairy products.

Healthy Steps

Day of Dance has participants moving toward healthier lifestyles

When people think of exercise, they tend to picture treadmills, elliptical machines and free weights. But exercise doesn't always have to be a chore.

On Saturday, Feb. 26, 2011, the Spirit of Women program at Indiana Regional Medical Center celebrated its third Day of Dance for Your Health at the Indiana Mall. The focus of the day was to encourage participants to adopt a healthier lifestyle and to provide education that can help reduce cardiovascular risks and improve overall health.

Day of Dance for Your Health uses dancing as a fun way to engage participants in physical activity. This year's dance performances included IUP's Dance Theater and Ritmo Latino Dance Crew, Sunflower Yoga's Belly Dancing class, the Silver Spurs Line Dancers,



Zumba Gold from ShapeXpress, and the Mahoning Valley Ballet from Van Dyke and Company.

Three cooking demonstrations, which focused on ways to reduce calories, fat and sodium in meals, were also held.

But the big attraction of the day was the MEGA Heart—the world's only portable, inflatable, walk-through heart exhibit. The MEGA Heart welcomed more than 1,000 visitors with a highly interactive educational experience about heart disease. As visitors move through the exhibit, they get a close-up view of

heart valves, mitral valve prolapsed, thrombus, coronary arteries, and coronary bypass graft and stents.

Indiana Regional Medical Center is a member of the Spirit of Women Network of hospitals and health care providers—a nationwide group that ascribes to high standards of excellence in women's health, education and community outreach. Nearly 1,300 women have committed to making good health a priority by joining the IRMC Spirit of Women program.

For more information, visit www.indianarmc.org/svc-spirit-of-women.html.

Highmark Health@Hand

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Imagine you're at the airport waiting for your flight to depart when you experience a sharp pain in your side. When it doesn't subside, you begin to worry. With only a few minutes before your plane boards, how will you find the time or resources to fix this potentially dangerous problem?

Thanks to the Highmark Health@Hand iPhone application, you should no longer find yourself in this predicament. Instead, you'll have the answers to medical questions right at your fingertips. This free Highmark service provides millions of members access to valuable health and wellness information wherever they are, so they can take greater control of

their health.

The iPhone uses GPS technology to pinpoint your exact location. As a result, Highmark members can easily find nearby Highmark medical facilities and health care providers. The app also provides interactive health information that allows members to get answers to questions about illnesses and medical conditions.

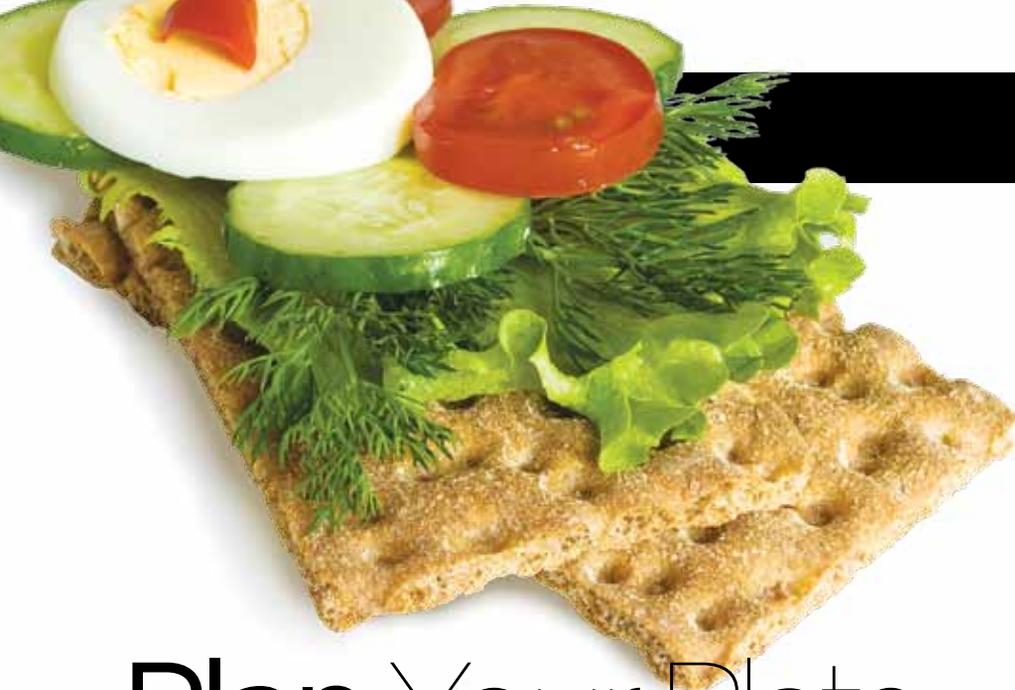
"Mobile phone applications open up an entirely new channel for interaction with our members," says Matthew Childs, vice president of Highmark's Web strategy and development department. "Highmark has a long-standing commitment to helping our members have a greater

hand in their health."

With this app, Highmark members have the ability to access a growing number of health and wellness discounts. It also links members to complementary programs and services from companies, such as Reebok, Jenny Craig, LasikPlus, Fairmont and more. Members can access the discounts by visiting www.highmarkbcbs.com and selecting the "Choose Providers" tab.

"These national discount partners give our members discounts of up to 50 percent on products and services that can keep them healthy and well," Childs says.

Members can access the Highmark Health@Hand app by logging on to www.highmarkbcbs.com, selecting the "Choose Providers" tab, obtaining the registration code and linking to Apple iTunes to download.



Plan Your Plate

It's not difficult to make healthy eating a daily routine

Planning nutritious meals doesn't mean you have to give up all of your favorite foods. Just follow a few simple steps, and you'll be on your way to healthier habits in no time.

Eat a wide variety of foods.

Incorporate an assortment of colorful fruits and vegetables, whole-grain breads and pastas, low-fat and fat-free dairy products, and lean proteins when planning your meals. Balance these elements on the plate, with fresh fruits and veggies getting the most real estate.

Limit your portion sizes to the right size for you. Read the "Nutrition Facts" food label on the packaging to learn serving sizes. Also, remember these rule-of-thumb tips: A 3-ounce portion of protein is about the size of a deck of cards; 1/2 cup of potato, rice or pasta is similar to the size of a computer mouse; and one piece of fruit is about the size of a baseball. Don't worry about portion sizes with vegetables—just eat them!

Stock your kitchen with healthy snacks. Eliminate cookies, potato chips and ice cream from your grocery list. Instead, stock up on fruit, vegetables and yogurt.

Don't leave your healthy attitude at home when eating out. Restaurants often provide gigantic

food portions, so plan to split a meal or ask the waitstaff for a to-go box so you can take some of your meal home. You can also order from the senior's, kid's or lunch menus, or select an appetizer as your entrée and add a side salad.

Bring your lunch to work. Rather than opting for fast food, grabbing an unhealthy snack from the vending machine or skipping lunch altogether, plan ahead and bring your own healthy meal to work.

Highmark wants you to live a healthy lifestyle. All Highmark members and nonmembers can engage in health and wellness programs, including nutrition and weight management options. These programs are offered free of charge to Highmark members and at a minimal fee for nonmembers. For a list of programs, dates and times, call (800) 879-2217 or visit www.wellnesswhereyoulive.com.

Highmark also offers its members access to online lifestyle improvement programs through its member website at www.highmarkbs.com. For more information about Highmark, visit www.highmark.com.

Good Foods for Good Moods

The best way to maintain a positive mood, high energy level and optimal concentration is to eat a wide variety of foods that are high in nutritional value. Below are healthy eating tips that provide a bevy of benefits.

1. Focus on nutrient-rich foods. Eating comfort foods may help you relax, but it's only temporary. Nutrient-rich food provides a consistent and long-lasting boost to your health, mood, energy and alertness.

2. Cut back on fat intake. A high-fat diet can be a real brain and energy drain. Say no to deep-fried foods, and look for foods that contain no more than 3 grams of fat per serving.

3. Eat moderate portions and avoid large meals. During periods of digestion, your blood supply is directed to the digestive tract and away from the brain. This may lead to fatigue and lethargy.

4. Eat regular meals. Skipping meals can slow your metabolic rate. The lower your metabolism, the lower your energy level. Plan regular meals and snacks to keep your metabolic rate and blood sugar levels normal. This will provide your brain the appropriate means to function properly and handle stress.

Perfect 10

Revamp your kids' restaurant order and help them develop healthier habits BY DR. WILL CLOWER

Eating out at restaurants can be a fun treat for kids, as well as an enormous convenience for parents.

Families are dining out together more often, according to a survey of 6- to 17-year-olds conducted by KRC Research. In fact, 87 percent of children and teens eat out with their families once a month or more, and nearly half of them eat out at least once a week.

Unfortunately, these extra trips to restaurants translate into loads of extra calories for your kids, especially when you consider that the average child eats an additional 350 calories per meal when dining out. Thus, kids who eat out three or more times a week can take in more than 40 percent more calories a day compared to kids who eat meals at home.

But if you help your kids follow a few simple rules, you'll prevent those regular restaurant visits from negatively impacting your family's health.

1. Be a positive role model. Practice healthy habits yourself, and it will be much easier to convince your kids to do the same.

2. Encourage conversation about good food and good health—and remember, it should be a two-way street. Once you talk about the principles of eating well, ask your kids what they think.

3. Stay in control of the conversation by setting clearly defined boundaries about which foods are acceptable. For example, you might say that artificial sweeteners, such as aspartame, are off limits.



4. Whatever rules you choose, allow some room for flexibility. Although you may never have soda at home, you might allow your kids to order one as a treat when dining out.

5. Let your kids help pick the restaurant. Talk with them about the different options that are out there, and get their thoughts on which are the healthiest and tastiest. If they are part of the process, they will have more ownership over the decision.

6. When ordering your meal, show your kids that bigger is not necessarily better. Don't buy a super-sized meal just because it's a better deal.

7. Look for menu substitutions and engage your children in making those same choices. You might encourage them to have fruit for dessert or, if they are having fries, to include a healthy side, as well.

8. Get your kids into the habit of taking leftovers home. All those extra restaurant calories don't just come from the poor quality of the food; they also come from the enormous quantity served. Take your to-go boxes home, and eat your leftovers together the next day.

9. Don't forget that you can review most restaurants' menu items online with your kids, so you don't have to make snap decisions right there at the table. Many websites even offer nutritional information.

10. Talk about eating healthy foods as a means of improving overall health—not simply as a way to lose weight.

Dr. Will Clower is the award-winning author of *The Fat Fallacy* and CEO of Mediterranean Wellness. For more information, visit www.willclower.com.