

Building a Healthy Family: One Step at a Time

There is no time like a new year to invest in your health and the health of your family. For 2008, these steps can help start you eating smarter and moving more.

Track your food choices. Start by keeping track of what each of you eat and drink, along with how much, when, and why. This helps to identify which food groups you may be missing and the times when you don't even realize you are "eating". For example do you automatically make a "snack" to watch TV? Have you eaten a full plate while preparing the meal? A great place to start is www.mypyramid.gov. It provides a guide to a well-balanced eating plan and has "tracking sheets" you can print and use.



Set realistic goals. Decide what *you* want, such as a healthier weight or lower cholesterol. And remember that change doesn't mean giving up a food you like. However, smaller portions, different ways of cooking or being more physically active give you more "wiggle room."

Make a plan for change. Divide big goals, such as "I will eat better," into smaller, more specific goals, such as "I will eat one more piece of fruit each day." Write down practical steps you can take to achieve your goals. For example:

Goal: Eat more whole-grain foods every day.

Steps: Make sandwiches and toast with whole-grain bread.

Switch to brown rice.

Eat oatmeal for breakfast.

Add whole-wheat pasta or whole barley to vegetable soups.

Re-evaluate your plan every month or two. Monitor how the changes you're making fit with your goals, and make additional changes as needed.

Be patient. Changes that last, take time, commitment, and encouragement. Most health goals take a lifelong commitment. Stick with your plan and remember that small steps toward reaching your goal add up over time. If you get off track, pick up where you left off and start again.

Establishing healthy choices in your children is the best "health" insurance for their future. It is well documented in the literature that students who are well nourished are better able to learn. In addition, a healthy lifestyle can prevent or treat many diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, obesity, diabetes and cancer. These are not just "adult" diseases, but an accumulation of lifestyle choices learned from childhood to present.

If you are interested in learning more about healthy choices for you and your family, please visit the "**Building Healthy Families**" page on the [Canton Public Schools](http://www.cantonpublicschools.org) website. There is still space available for the last 2 sessions of the Building Healthy Families program. The program is FREE, but you must pre-register using the form on the website. The dates are **February 5th** and **March 4th, 2008**.

Best wishes for a Healthy Year!