

Why eating well can make you happy

I believe that eating well is a pleasurable experience because good food tastes good and because it has important health benefits.

In a recent UCLA Healthy Years Newsletter it suggests: “The choices we make about how we treat our bodies as we grow older can make all the difference, not only in the length of our lives, but, perhaps more importantly, the quality of our lives.”

That said, it seems to me that choosing to eat well day after day (OK, let's say 80 percent of the time) can directly affect our happiness. When we feel good — energized and satisfied, with all systems go, our dispositions tend to be more positive. Also, the adverse is true, when we don't feel good, whether we are battling a disease or just some bad indigestion, it's a real challenge to be in a good mood. Our food choices and our physical activity levels are the most direct means I know of to promote optimal health and thereby, happiness.

There is a plethora of research upholding the understanding that healthy food choices promote longevity as well as lowering one's risk of a variety of

health problems like heart disease, diabetes, cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, being overweight, vision problems and cognitive decline. Hand in hand with the research comes the often confusing news stories that include ever-changing diet recommendations that can

eventually make us throw up our hands up and say “I'm just going to eat what I want!” Honestly, the overall nutrition recommendations really haven't changed in all the years I've been cooking and studying nutrition. The basic guidelines still hold true and are likely familiar to us all. It's best to emphasize a plant-based diet, one that includes a plentiful variety of vegetables and fruits. When choosing grains (baked items, cereals, pastas, rice, etc.) try to select whole grains most of the time. When it comes to meat and dairy foods, look for lean and low-fat options. And, try to keep added fats, sugars and salts to a minimum. If you're looking for

Silver Threads

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good food-choice guidelines consider the DASH diet (Dietary Approach to Stop Hypertension), the “Mediterranean Diet”, or the guidelines represented by MyPyramid. These all highlight the types of food choices that are known to be front line disease-prevention. Or if you want it really simple ... Michael Pollan sums it up in seven words: “Eat Foods. Mostly Plants. Not Too Much” Check out his book “In Defense of Food” for further explanation.

Here at the Senior Center we make meals that are designed to taste good and be good for you. Our menus are based on a variety of healthy choices that all add up to a new definition of the “Happy Meal” — menus promoting health and happiness. I don't pretend to think that every meal is everyone's favorite, but that's where variety and choice comes into play. Speaking of which, we're happy to announce that our 3-S Bar — Soup, Sandwich and Salad (often

including a sweet treat) is expanding to Monday—Friday. So, during the week our Senior Center dining room customers will have a choice between our traditional menu-line and our 3-S Bar. This might be just the thing for some of you downtown working types age 60 or over. In addition, we have our other meal locations including Heritage Towers and Tongue River (Dayton) — Monday-Friday; Story on Tuesdays; Big Horn on Thursdays; and our Home Delivered Meals program every day of the year. Please give us a call or stop by to enjoy our meals any or every day.

So, whether you are a potential Senior Center customer or hoping to reach that age someday, the old saying “You are what you eat” really is true. Take good care of yourselves by making healthy food choices — health and happiness can be your great reward.

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Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan Community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.