

March is national nutrition month

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March is National Nutrition Month, an important annual campaign presented by the Dietitians of Canada and dietitians across our country, which encourages Canadians to embrace healthy eating while enjoying food in the company of friends and family with the added benefit of healthy living and disease prevention. It's an excellent opportunity for each of us to rediscover our relationship with food and how we can make small changes for our long-term health and wellbeing.

The origins of National Nutrition Month date back more than 30 years, as the most prevalent awareness campaign by professional dietitians. What began in the late 1970's as a 'Nutrition Week' amongst a small group of community dietitians, expanded across several provinces hosting events everywhere from shopping malls to workplaces. It culminated in 1981 when all of the provincial dietetic association's came together for the first National Nutrition Week. The aim was to raise public awareness of the value of healthy eating by recognizing dietitians as the most reliable source for food and nutrition information for Canadians, resulting in an entire month being dedicated to the campaign by the end of the 1980's. The theme of each year's campaign is chosen by the Dietitians of Canada, which can change from year to year. This year's theme of Unlock the Potential of Food, building on the 2018 campaign by dietitians to, 'help Canadians unlock the potential of food to enhance lives, improve health, inspire children, fuel activities and bring people together.'

National Nutrition Month can spark our interest in unlocking the potential of food. One way the Dietitians of Canada suggest we can do this is to stay energized by planning and incorporating nutritious snacks into our day. Dietitians of Canada has five helpful tips which include: i) plan ahead; ii) be aware of portion sizes; iii) listen to your hunger cues; iv) skip distracted snacking; and v) snack on vegetables. For more detailed information and healthy snack ideas, please visit www.dietitians.ca Another way the Dietitians of Canada suggests we can unlock the potential of food is to encourage healthy eating habits in children by teaching them to shop and cook. There are five tips offered by Dietitians of Canada to achieve this goal, which include: i) pick a recipe and shop together; ii) incorporate learning; iii) keep it fun; iv) be a role model; and v) be cool about a mess. For more information, please visit www.dietitians.ca

Dietitians of Canada reminds us that we can also use National Nutrition Month to increase our understanding on how the food we eat can prevent chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease. When we follow a nutritious diet, we can do our part to reduce our risk of developing these and other chronic diseases by building a balanced diet or 'eating patterns,' which share common foods, including: vegetables and fruit; whole grains; legumes (such as beans and lentils); nuts and seeds; milk, cheese, and yogurt; fish, seafood, and poultry; as well as healthy oils (such as canola and olive oil). For more information, please visit www.dietitians.ca

National Nutrition Month can also be an opportunity to further educate ourselves on how the food we eat can assist healing and how dietitians work with doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and other health care professionals to provide the best possible care to patients. Dietitians who can be found everywhere from hospitals, to community health centres, to grocery stores, can assist us in choosing foods to achieve our nutrition goals, as well as provide guidance on food preparation. More information on how dietitians can help may be found at www.dietitians.ca

We can also view National Nutrition Month as an opportunity to remind ourselves of the importance of sharing meals with family and friends, as Dietitians of Canada suggests. Our daily schedules are hectic and full; however, it's important to make the effort to come together to eat because of its positive benefits for every age group. For more information on the benefits of eating together, tips, and recipes, please visit www.dietitians.ca

National Nutrition Month has once again arrived. It's a perfect time to rediscover the happiness that eating with family and friends can bring us, as well as how food can help improve our overall health, heal our bodies, and prevent chronic diseases. Dietitians in communities all across Canada have played and continue to play a very important role in increasing our understanding of how we can achieve these most important goals.