

# Journal *focus on food*

## Healthy food choices abound in Valley markets

By DENISE KELLER

The approach of swimsuit season is not the only thing that has people watching their weight these days. The continually increasing number of studies linking obesity to health problems such as diabetes and heart disease is causing people to become more serious about maintaining a healthy body weight, according to Patricia Edwards, a clinical dietician at Yakima Regional.

Although obesity rates seem to be stabilizing, America is experiencing "an epidemic of obesity," Edwards says. One in three American adults are obese, according to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Medical professionals define obesity as having a body mass in-

dex (BMI) of 30 or greater. BMI is a measure of body fat based on height and weight and can be calculated with an online tool.

Katie Wolff, chief clinical dietician at Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital, says it is less important to see a certain number on the scale than it is to be physically fit, exercise at least 30 minutes a day and eat right. However, those priorities are contrary to the sedentary lifestyle and busy schedules common to many families.

"You're working long hours and running the kids around and just having a busy life, and by the time you eat, you're doing fast food," Wolff says. "It takes planning ahead to eat healthy and an actual conscious effort to look for things that are healthy."

Healthy food can be found in any grocery store, dieticians say, if shoppers look in the right places.

"Always start off with the fresh fruits and vegetables and sticking with lean meats," Edwards says. "We are lucky here in the Valley in the summertime with the Farmers' Market, we have lots of fresh options. That's an extra bonus. But year-round, grocery stores are wonderful here. They do have a good variety of fresh produce and lean meats. It's what we pick as individuals."

Wolff recommends staying away from processed foods, which are more likely to be high in calories, fat or salt. Look for things that are high in fiber and low in saturated fat. Keep in

mind, though, that foods labeled as "fat-free" can sometimes be misleading, she says. They may have a lot of sugar or salt added instead.

"It's just a change in what you're looking for," Wolff says. "And even your favorite types of meals can just be modified." Change an enchilada recipe, for example, by cutting the amount of ground beef in half and substituting beans for the remainder to make the meal more nutritious.

Huckleberry's Fresh Market, a department of Rosauers that carries all-natural and organic selections of food from bread to chicken, has been increasing in popularity, according to employee Megan Paulakis. Shoppers who want to make healthier food choices can find knowledgeable staff available to assist.

"We have a big book of information we call the 'Health food Bible' at the service desk," Paulakis says.

Parents who eat nutritiously not only improve their own health, but also help develop healthy habits in their children. The rising rate of childhood obesity has been receiving special attention. In February, First Lady

Michelle Obama launched "Let's Move," a nationwide campaign to solve the challenge of childhood obesity within a generation.

"Modeling is a big thing in terms of what we [as parents] prioritize," Wolff says. "To tell them to do one thing and us not do it is probably not going to go over real well."

Getting kids to adopt a healthy diet can be a challenge, Wolff says, but creativity is key. Cut sandwiches into fun shapes, serve fruits in smoothies or vegetables in wraps, and let kids dip fruit into flavored yogurt or veggies in a low-fat dressing.

"Keep introducing them to new tastes and new flavors. Some kids might like things raw and crunchy; others might prefer it cooked. It's finding that individuality and running with it," Edwards says.

To find recipe ideas and additional information about nutrition, visit websites from organizations such as the American Dietetic Association ([www.eat-right.org](http://www.eat-right.org)), American Heart Association ([www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)) and United States Department of Agriculture ([www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)).