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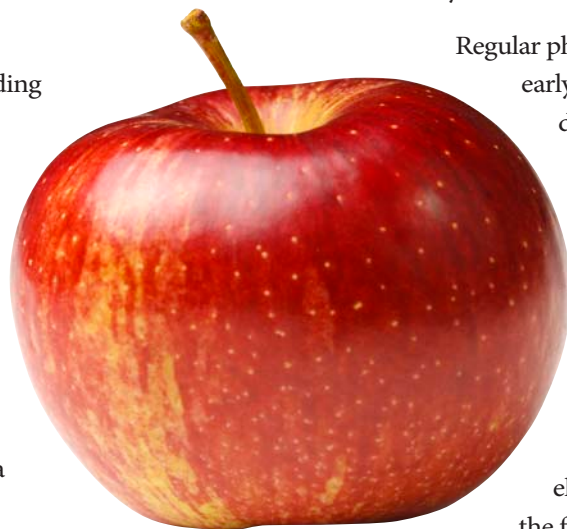


African Americans in North Carolina have a greater risk of developing heart disease, diabetes and cancer than the general population.

What is the cause of this health disparity? Researchers are unsure, but believe it may be caused by stress, lack of access to preventive healthcare, cultural norms and environmental factors. We can't always change our economic status, or the environment in which we live, but making a few simple changes in life – simply eating smarter and moving more – can greatly reduce our chances of developing health problems later in life.

Eat Smart.

How do you eat smart? Start by including more calcium-rich foods like milk and more whole grains in your diet. Whole grains include brown rice, wheat, rye and oats. Add in fruits and vegetables, the more colorful, the better. Make sure your protein sources are low-fat – take the skin off your chicken before eating it to lower your fat intake. Choose lower-fat cuts of beef and include beans for a low-fat protein.



Make sure your portion size is reasonable and limit your intake of sugary beverages. Enjoy the taste of unsweet tea or trade your sugary soda for water or diet soda.

Eating smart also means eating breakfast every morning. Taking time for a quick bite in the morning will raise your metabolism, making it easier to lose weight. It will also energize your brain and keep you going strong until lunchtime. Make the morning rush easier on yourself by preparing your breakfast the night before. Pack some sliced fruit and cheese, a sandwich or a carton of yogurt and brown bag your breakfast in the morning.

Eating as a family can improve your finances as well as your health. Instead of ordering in, sit down as a family and eat a home-cooked meal. Not only will this improve your health, it

will teach your children to eat right and look after their own health as well.

Evenings can be busy for many families. Cut down on your cooking time by planning weekly menus, cooking enough for two meals and freezing half for another night and keeping your pantry stocked with staples, such as tuna, pasta, rice and canned beans.

Move More.

In addition to a good diet, a healthy lifestyle includes a certain amount of physical activity. Research indicates that adults need at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity each week for optimal health. This activity can be split up throughout the week, but should be spread over at least three different days.

Regular physical activity will lower your risk for early death, heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and colon and breast cancers.

It can also reduce depression, control your weight and improve your muscular fitness, as well as your heart and lung function.

You don't have to join a gym to improve your physical fitness; there is plenty you can do on your own. For example, take the stairs instead of the elevator, enjoy an after-dinner walk with the family, ride bikes with your children or simply dance around your living room to get your heart pumping.

Be flexible and creative. It should be as much about enjoying activity as it is about exercise.

Improving your health does not need to include drastic lifestyle changes. You can take charge of your own health simply by committing to eat smart and move more. For more information on how you can take charge of your health, visit www.capefearvalley.com/takecharge.



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