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'Portion telling'

Character at nutrition fair advises families to scale down serving sizes

By Jennifer L Boen

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Imagine sitting at the family breakfast table and offering your children a whole-grain "CD pancake" with a "postage stamp of butter," a "walnut of syrup" and a "baseball orange," along with a "baseball of milk."

At lunch, you tell them to spread a "walnut of peanut butter" on the "CD-case bread slice." Add two pair of "cheese dice." When it comes to the raw veggies, you tell them to "have at it." But, like most kids, they want some dip, so you give them half a shot glass of low-fat ranch dressing. Finish off lunch with a "light-bulb pear."

Dinner might be a "card deck of roast beef," half a "computer mouse baked potato," a "fistful - even two - of green beans," with a "baseball of strawberries" served over "half a baseball of frozen yogurt" for dessert.

Seem like an odd way to eat? The "Portion Teller" says no. She will look into her crystal ball on Aug. 28 and help families recognize the right amounts of food to eat at a community-wide nutrition fair in Franke Park.

The Portion Teller is Fort Wayne Community Schools dietitian Dorie Fowls, who has developed her character and ideas based on the book, "**The Portion Teller Plan,**" by Lisa R. Young.

Fowls' character is one of several personalities appearing at the free event. All will provide nutritional guidance for busy families, including how to dine healthily at a fast-food restaurant; recipes for quick, nutritional snacks; learning to read your internal "fuel gauge;" and tips for putting children in the "food driver's seat," with parents in the decision-maker's role of offering healthy options.

Parents and children can combine exercise and nutritional education in a round of "Pineapple," sponsored by the YMCA of Greater Fort Wayne, or use stethoscopes to hear the effects of exercise on their hearts. Garden greens will be planted and taken home by participants.

In addition to the pineapple bowling - the pineapples are the pins, a melon the bowling ball - Brian West, wellness director of the Jorgensen Family YMCA, is

organizing a food triangle race in which kids will run a course and choose food options for the various nutritional categories.

"We know that in this day and age with kids, we need to try to get them moving, but have to be creative. They have to see it as a fun activity," West said. Bowling is certainly not the most vigorous exercise, but it is an activity family members of all ages can enjoy. Families will learn other resourceful ways to increase physical activity while having fun together.

"Food brings people together. It's part of our culture, our social times, but we need to make sure it's healthy," said Marsha Worthington, a nurse with Fort Wayne Cardiology and coordinator of the event. "The whole emphasis on this event is on health, not obesity. How do we drive the health of our families? It's about becoming aware of food choices, or what and how much we should be eating."

Much of Americans' overeating is because food is used to meet emotional needs that are not being met by family, Worthington said. "Whatever the problem is, we'll fix it with food," but we should be viewing food as "fuel for our bodies, fuel to help us function," Worthington said.

One of the key messages organizers hope to drive home is the "difference between a portion size and a serving size," Worthington said.

"A portion is what we chose to eat, and a serving size is a standard unit of measure," Worthington said, noting the 9-, 10- or 16-ounce steak is "what we're served." The federally-designated serving size of meat is 2 to 3 ounces, or the size of a deck of cards. That 16-ounce steak equals in one meal more than four times the recommended meat or poultry amount for an entire day.

While many fast-food and full-menu restaurants are offering healthier choices, such as fruit cups, salads and apple slices instead of a side of fries, today's parents, as much as the children, are waging a biggie battle, a super-size scuffle, to skip the larger and larger menu portions.

Other changes sound good, but don't offer significant improvement.

This summer, for example, officials at the Indiana State Fair announced all foods sold at the fair would be cooked without trans-fats. While that is a step in the right direction, it is a negligible improvement nutritionally for deep-fried Ho-Ho's and elephant ears, Worthington said.

"There are an awful lot of mixed nutritional messages," she said. "Parents need to be good role models. Most parents are on the run. They want what's quick, what's fast. Our goal is to provide a lot of different models for families to choose from to improve their nutrition in a fun way."