

Rocky Mountain News

January 1, 2008

Perfect meal not identical for everyone

When it comes to planning the perfect meal for good health, it should be all about you: Your lifestyle. Your family health history. Your taste preferences. Your personal fitness goals.

It doesn't mean you have to choke down tofu and bean sprouts if you don't like them, or find the time to eat six small meals a day when you prefer breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Nutrition researchers know the best way to encourage people to improve their dietary habits for the long haul is to design them around the foods people will actually eat.

What works for one person may not work for another. Here are some tips.

* Preview to be prepared. If you're going out, that doesn't mean you shouldn't know what's for dinner. The restaurant's Web site will give you an idea of what to order. Or look over the menu while you wait for the table.

* Calorie world in your hands. If you have a BlackBerry or other PDA, check fat and calorie content of restaurant dishes while you read the menu. Try **calorieking.com**.

* Do a little browsing. Check what other diners are eating to gauge portion sizes. If portions are huge, split the entree or ask to be served half and take the rest home. You'll also get to see if the "served with baby spring greens" is a sizable serving of salad or a disappointing wisp of garnish.

* Ask and ye shall receive. Ask the waiter for descriptions of dishes, including how they are prepared. Do they use a lot of butter on the broiled fish? Is the cauliflower soup cream-based? Can you get a cup instead of a bowl?

Think of your plate as a color palette: The more color (fruits and vegetables), the better. Sometimes it's what you add to a meal that makes it healthy, not what you avoid.

Why not ask for these to be biggie-size? If they freely offer huge portions of french fries, why not a double portion of steamed broccoli?

If the grouper needs something and you don't want to add tartar sauce, ask for lemons or hot sauce. The balsamic vinaigrette for the salad might even be the best request to rescue your fish.