

Healthy Lifestyles

The month of March is marked as National Nutrition Month, and includes American Diabetes Alter Day on March 23. BCHD hopes to help prevent chronic diseases including diabetes and heart disease, by assuring that people can make healthy choices that reduce their risks for disease. One of the most important ways to keep healthy is to eat a healthy diet and get the recommended amount of physical activity. Unfortunately, many people in the US and in Berrien County do not eat as many healthy fruits and vegetables as they need, and do not get adequate amounts of activity. This leads to being overweight and obese, as well as many chronic health conditions.

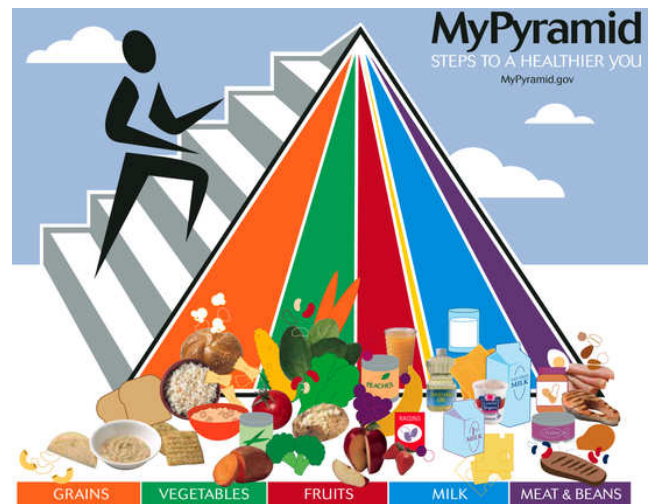
Over 70% of Berrien County residents report not eating the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables daily.

According to the 2008 Berrien County Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, many residents are overweight or obese and do not make healthy lifestyle choices. For example, this survey revealed that 44% of residents are considered overweight and 28.5% are considered obese, with only 27.5% considered in the “normal” weight category. Contributing to these high rates of overweight and

obesity is the fact that over 70% of residents do not eat the recommended amount of servings of fruit and vegetables daily, and over 42% get *less than* the recommended amount of physical activity.

The USDA has created a tool to help people plan a personalized, balanced diet with components from all five food groups. The most healthy thing that most people can do, however, is to increase their intake of fruits and vegetables every day to at least 5 servings. Some easy ways to “sneak in” your 5 a day include:

- Add berries or bananas to your cereal
- Add tomatoes, bell peppers, or spinach to your omelets
- Add veggies such as broccoli, peas, corn, or green beans to casserole and pasta dishes
- When you go out to eat, choose beans, a vegetable, or a side salad instead of French fries
- Add a box of raisins or a bag of baby carrots to your kids’ school lunch
- Snack on bell peppers or broccoli with low fat ranch dip
- Keep a bowl of fruit instead of candy on your desk or counter
- Remember, canned or frozen fruits and vegetables are good choices, as long as they don’t add fat, salt, or sugar.



In addition to making healthy food choices, it is also important to get at least 30 minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity on most days of the week. Examples of moderate/vigorous activity include brisk walking, jogging, running, dancing, swimming, bicycling, and weight training.

Berrien County Health Department offers Programs to Help People Maintain Healthy Lifestyles

WIC (Women, Infants, and Children)- this is a supplemental nutrition program for low and moderate income pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women, infants and children up to age five. The program provides a combination of nutrition education, supplemental foods, breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health care. WIC foods are selected to meet nutrient needs such as calcium, iron, folic acid, vitamins A and C. This program serves over 3,000 people each month in Berrien County.

We Can! (Ways to Enhance Children’s Activity & Nutrition!) Healthy Berrien, is a program from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to address the growing obesity epidemic among youth ages 8–13. **We Can!** reaches parents and caregivers in home and community settings with educational materials and activities. Berrien’s We Can! group’s vision is to Create a county-wide environment that fosters and encourages healthy lifestyles, Empower residents to make healthy choices through education, encouragement, and policy change, Maximize existing community resources, and Facilitate partnerships to fill existing gaps in programs.



Generation With Promise is a State program headed by the Surgeon General and operates in Michigan’s Cities of Promise, including two Benton Harbor middle schools. The project empowers Student Action Teams to make their schools a healthier environment. Some changes have included offering healthier choices for school lunches and at activity concession stands, and development of a walking track and after-school walking club.

Other projects include partnering with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission to plan and map a Rail to Trail project in Benton Harbor, and working with Seely McCord Elementary School to enhance physical education and nutrition eating.

For more information on healthy behaviors:
www.bchdmi.org <http://www.mypyramid.gov/index.html> <http://www.wecanhealthyberrien.net/>