

Jenni Dye at the Wednesday farmers' market in Chico with her children.

PHOTO BY JASON HALLEY COURTESY OF CHICO STATE

recalled a moment when she was counseling a family and a father suggested that his daughter stop eating blueberries.

She replied that "eating fruit isn't what's causing the weight gain."

"It's all the other things that we're eating," she continued. "There is a direct correlation between your intake and your preference when it comes to sugar, fat and salt. So the more intake ... of sugar, your preference for that amount lines up."

The dietitians often find themselves echoing the refrain: eat your fruits and vegetables. Rather than cutting out fruits because they have natural sugars, Murphy said, people should focus on lowering their intake of added sugars and sugary drinks (e.g., specialty coffees and sodas). Then, over time, people will find that their cravings aren't as intense.

"The benefits of fruit overall—the vitamins and the minerals and all those things, the fiber of the fruit—really [outweigh the fact] that natural sugar's occurring," Dye added.

Fruit has antioxidants and phytochemicals that combat cancer, she continued. And it's well-documented that fiber—which also can be found in whole grains, beans and nuts—has benefits that include improving digestive health and relief from constipation as well as lowering the risk of

From left: Registered dietitians Jennifer Murphy, Jenni Dye and Amy Gonzales, with the Center for Healthy Communities, encourage people to create small goals to help them make positive, sustainable changes to their diets.

PHOTO BY ASHIAH SCHARAGA



diabetes, heart disease and colon cancer.

A well-balanced diet can have an impact on mental health as well, making a significant difference in how people feel. For example, one recent study published in the journal PLOS ONE by researchers from Macquarie University in Australia showed that young adults significantly reduced their symptoms of depression when they had a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and lean proteins and avoided processed foods.

Gonzales added that for the brain to properly function, it needs all those nutrients, vitamins, minerals and glucose.

"If you're not eating well, you're not giving your brain everything it needs," she said. "So of course we can't think clearly, of course we're not feeling as good, of course we feel sluggish."

Given this inclusive approach to nutrition, it might not come as a surprise that the trio does not endorse fad diets. Rather, they recommend taking small steps to make lifestyle changes. Adding a serving of vegetables to one meal each day, they said, is a great example.

Small goals help people make positive, sustainable changes, they said. When people focus on what they can eat, rather than what they can't, it sets them up for success, Gonzales added, because they aren't focused on what they are missing.

"If you are trying to make a change, be realistic: Don't try to change your entire lifestyle or your entire diet. Pick one or two things and work on those for two or three weeks, and then once you have those down, then try the next thing," Gonzales said. "It can be overwhelming sometimes to make all these changes, and then you fail and then you feel like a failure and you just give up."

They even encourage indulging cravings—while being mindful of portion sizes and consuming them in moderation.

"I have chocolate every night," Dye said with a laugh. "It's in moderation, but I'm like, I'm not gonna not have chocolate for the day. I just have a little square."

Murphy added: "If you really do embark on a lifestyle change, cookies and muffins and chocolate and chips are going to be part of it."

"When we talk with kids, we talk about 'sometimes' foods and 'anytime' foods. Fruits and vegetables, whole grains, all that is an anytime food. But some of that other stuff is sometimes. It's not a never. It's a sometimes. It's a part of a healthy lifestyle. It has to be."

—ASHIAH SCHARAGA
ashiahs@newsreview.com

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