

Eating Right: It's Best to Make Your Diet Mostly Plants

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Irany Franca presents a program on a plant-based diet to the Lakeland prostate cancer support group at the Center for Cancer Care & Research last week.

LAKELAND | Gluten-free diet? More carbs? Fewer carbs?

Vegan or vegetarian? To juice or not to juice?

Every new dietary "discovery" may leave your head spinning, but Irany Maduro Franca brought the buzz down to earth last week in a talk to the Lakeland Prostate Educational Support Group.

A diet high in fat, especially animal fat, may increase your risk of prostate and other cancers.

A healthy diet helps boost energy, enhances the immune system and facilitates recovery. It's best to make your diet mostly plants, she said, and eat in moderation.

"Choose better what you're eating," she recommended.

"Choose more fruits, vegetables and whole grains and less of the meat. If you do eat your meat, have fruits, have vegetables with the meat."

In a mostly male audience, that's bold talk, but Franca came prepared to counter any moans about giving up meat.

Not getting sidetracked by discussion of vegan or vegetarian, the Keiser University student said she doesn't say give up meat.

Just eat less of it.

Ease into more of a plant diet by experimenting with different vegetables, healthier grains and fruits. A variety of different-colored vegetables is best, she said.

Steam vegetables instead of boiling them in water.

Make more vegetable appetizers. Have one or more meatless days a week. Try one new fruit or vegetable a week.

Try various ways of preparing even vegetables you think you don't like, she said, because taste buds can change over time.

She got support from member Mike Armstrong, who said he was apprehensive when a visiting no-meat relative did the cooking.

"After three days, I said 'This is OK,'" he said. "It's knowing how to cook it."

Visit some of the growing number of ethnic restaurants in Polk County for a new appreciation of plant-based foods, said Nancy Ulm, a Watson Clinic dietitian who came to give Franca back-up support.

Franca has been interning with the clinic's nutrition education specialists.

After coming to the United States from Brazil 10 years ago, Franca said, she was amazed at the number of overweight people she saw.

Then, eager to try all the dishes her new country had to offer, she gained 25 pounds. To return to the slim shape she now has, Franca followed her own advice.

Follow a plant-based diet. Eat in moderation. Exercise.

What about steaks, one member asked plaintively.

"If you have to eat them, eat less of them," she retorted.

Meat should fill only one-fourth of your plate.

Put fruits, vegetables and whole grains on the rest.

If you worry about not getting enough protein, Franca said, there are alternative sources:

Lentils, some types of beans, nuts, whole grains, soy and sunflower, pumpkin and chia seeds. Beans to try include kidney, garbanzo, white, black and pinto.

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