University of Richmond Employee Wellness

Chew on This for Earth Day: How Our Diets Impact the Planet

The foods we choose to put on our plates — or toss away — could have more of an ecological impact than many of us realize. On Earth Day, here are some ways to consider how our diet impacts the planet.

Waste not, want not
You’ve heard the numbers on food waste. More than 30 percent of available food is tossed each year in America. It’s enough to fill Chicago’s 1,450-foot-tall Willis Tower 44 times over.

The U.S. has set an official goal to reduce food waste by 50 percent by the year 2030. Universities have begun to chip away at the food waste issue by promoting ugly fruit and vegetables and shifting away from pre-cooked, buffet style food, instead serving more cooked-to-order options that can cut down on waste. Food service companies are working with farmers and chefs to get more blemished but edible produce into cafeterias across the country.

And there are a host of proposed solutions. Among the most cost-effective strategies: educating consumers on food waste — including changes you can make in your own kitchen.

Rethink your beef and lamb habit
Everything we eat has an environmental footprint — it takes land, water and energy to grow crops and raise livestock. The folks at the World Resources Institute have calculated the greenhouse gas emissions associated with producing a gram of edible protein of various foods.

Not surprisingly, they found that foods such as beans, fish, nuts and egg have the lowest impact. Poultry, pork, milk and cheese have medium-sized impacts. By far, the biggest impacts, in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, were linked to beef, lamb and goat.

Why? According to WRI, beef uses 28 times more land per calorie consumed — and two to four times more freshwater — than the average of other livestock categories. What’s more, cows are less efficient than other animals, like pigs and poultry, at converting feed into food.

Still, telling people to go cold turkey with their red meat isn’t likely to inspire real change. But this message might resonate: Even if you don’t give up on red meat consumption entirely, just cutting back can significantly impact your diet’s carbon footprint.

Keep an eye out for more 'plant-based' dishes on restaurant menus
As interest in plant-centric diets booms, new food businesses have taken root — from the veggie-centric fast-casual chains Beefsteak (from celebrity chef Jose Andres) and Chloe (an all-vegan restaurant) to the vegan meal-kit company Purple Carrot.

Now, a new initiative from the World Resources Institute called the Better Buying Lab is bringing together big companies to nudge consumers towards choosing more sustainable foods. One initiative is to get more plant-based dishes onto menus.

"If you look at menus across the U.S., there tends to be [the same] 25 dishes that are on the majority of menus," says Daniel Vennard, director of the Better Buying Lab at WRI. Think burgers, chicken dishes, etc. "Not many [plant-based] dishes have scaled to become national favorites," Vennard says. His group is working to change that. Promising ideas include the concept of "superfood salads" — containing combinations of nuts, seeds, greens, veggies and avocado.

He points to ideas already out there as well, such as burgers that blend meat and mushrooms. "What we’re trying to do is shift consumers towards eating more sustainable food, but we’re not advocating for a no-meat diet," explains Vennard. "We’re saying, ‘Let’s moderate.’ "

Source: NPR
Educational Corner: Seasonal Allergies: Nip Them in the Bud

Spring means flower buds and blooming trees — and if you’re one of the millions of people who have seasonal allergies, it also means sneezing, congestion, a runny nose and other bothersome symptoms. Seasonal allergies — also called hay fever and allergic rhinitis — can make you miserable. But before you settle for plastic flowers and artificial turf, try these simple strategies to keep seasonal allergies under control.

Reduce your exposure to allergy triggers

- Stay indoors on dry, windy days. The best time to go outside is after a good rain, which helps clear pollen from the air.
- Delegate lawn mowing, weed pulling and other gardening chores that stir up allergens.
- Remove clothes you’ve worn outside and shower to rinse pollen from your skin and hair.
- Don’t hang laundry outside — pollen can stick to sheets and towels.

Take extra steps when pollen counts are high

- If high pollen counts are forecasted, start taking allergy medications before your symptoms start.
- Close doors and windows at night or any other time when pollen counts are high.
- Avoid outdoor activity in the early morning when pollen counts are highest.

Keep indoor air clean

- Use the air conditioning in your house and car.
- If you have forced air heating or air conditioning in your house, use high-efficiency filters and follow regular maintenance schedules.
- Keep indoor air dry with a dehumidifier.

When home remedies aren’t enough, see your doctor

If you have bad seasonal allergies, your doctor may recommend that you have skin tests or blood tests to find out exactly what allergens trigger your symptoms. Testing can help determine what steps you need to take to avoid your specific triggers and identify which treatments are likely to work best for you.

Source: Mayo Clinic

Healthy Cooking: Cauliflower Rice Tabbouleh

Ingredients:
- 1 large head of cauliflower or 12 oz. cauliflower rice
- 1 chopped cucumber
- 3/4 cup chopped cherry tomatoes
- 1/3 cup chopped red onion
- 1/3 cup chopped fresh mint
- 1/3 cup chopped fresh parsley
- Juice of 1 large lemon (about 1/4 cup)
- 1 tbsp. red wine vinegar
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- Salt to taste
- Lemon pepper seasoning to taste (optional)

Directions:
1. Prepare your cauliflower rice. If using a head of cauliflower, chop it into florets. Pulse for about 10-15 seconds in a food processor. If using a 12 oz. package of cauliflower rice, heat in the microwave for 3 minutes.
2. Place the rice in a large bowl. Add the herbs and vegetables, and mix well.
3. In a separate bowl, whisk together lemon juice, red wine vinegar, oil, salt, and lemon pepper. Pour dressing over the rice, and stir to coat.
4. Add more salt and lemon pepper to taste. Serve immediately or refrigerate to let the flavors combine.
5 Ways to Spring Clean Your Life for Health and Happiness

One spring weekend every year as a young child, my extended family met at Grandma’s house to help “spring clean.” This wasn’t any old cleaning – it involved the adults washing down walls and baseboards, repainting ceilings and trim, and washing windows and all of the window treatments. These days, “spring cleaning” for me usually means cleaning up my life – the behaviors, habits and routines that could use a good dusting off – rather than my home. If you, too, want a brighter perspective on your life, consider freshening up these four areas:

1. Your Thoughts
We all experience thousands of thoughts every day. With life’s daily hassles, it can become easy to get caught up in negative thinking such as pessimism, cynicism and comparison. When we view life with a negative filter, it becomes easier and easier to attach to those thoughts and ruminate on what’s wrong – instead of all that’s right.

The cleanup: Find the joy. Make a list of things that you enjoy doing and can easily fit into your life each week. This may include scheduling a manicure, hitting up the driving range, going to see a movie or meeting a friend for coffee. It can be anything, as long as it brings you happiness and is something you can do easily.

2. Your Habits
Everything we do in life works for us in one way or another – even the behaviors and habits we say we want to ditch. That’s what makes them tricky to change.

The cleanup: Take some time to do a review of your day. Write down everything you do from the time the alarm goes off in the morning until you lay down at night. Record how you’re spending your time, what you’re focusing on, your thoughts, feelings and everything else. Next, pick one thing to change. Maybe it’s never looking at Facebook on your phone. Eliminate one habit in your day that doesn’t serve you and replace it with one that does.

4. Your Diet
Most of us know the area of our diets that could use the most work. If you don’t, ask yourself: What’s the one aspect of your eating that you wish you could improve? Maybe it’s to eat less fast food, eat more fruits and veggies, snack less, or eat more mindfully.

The cleanup: Set a goal for yourself around that behavior. Keep the goal simple, actionable and totally reasonable. If you currently eat fast food five days a week, cut it down to four. If you’re eating zero vegetables, plan to eat just one a day. Each week you hit your daily goal, reward yourself – just not with a type of unhealthy food or drink you’re trying to limit.

5. Your Workouts
It’s too easy to get into the indoor exercise equipment rut during the early, dark winter days. While that routine is convenient when it’s snowy or cold outside, many of us end up carrying the same workout program into the spring – and don’t see the results we could.

The cleanup: Lose the treadmill and elliptical machines and take your workout outdoors. Change it up and try fartlek training. Fartlek is a German word that means “speed play,” and it can be a great tool for increasing your speed and endurance. Using random objects in your environment, decide to push yourself a little harder in your running workouts. You may choose to sprint between lampposts at the park or pick up your pace until you get to the next fire hydrant. Adding speed intervals is a great way to get more work done in less time.

Just like your house, you don’t need to overhaul everything to see a brighter picture in your health and your choices. Simple tweaks in your habits can bring a fresher, lighter feel to your life.

Source: U.S. News & World Report
Karen’s Korner, Karen Hensley, UR Dietician: Staying Hydrated—Staying Healthy

Making sure that your body is hydrated helps your heart pump blood through the blood vessels to the muscles easier. It also helps the muscles work more efficiently. Dehydration can be a serious condition that can lead to a host of health problems from swollen feet or a headache to more serious and life threatening illnesses such as heat stroke.

Your goal is to be hydrated throughout the day, which means carrying water with you and drinking fluids frequently. The amount of water a person needs varies from person to person and depends on climatic conditions, clothing worn and exercise intensity and duration. Thirst is not a good indicator of when you need to drink. If you get thirsty, you’re already dehydrated. The easiest way to tell if you are hydrated is to pay attention to the color of your urine. Pale and clear urine means you’re well hydrated. If it’s dark, drink more fluids.

For most people, water is the best thing to drink to stay hydrated. Don’t forget that some foods contain water also, such as fruit and vegetables. Try to avoid soft drinks and fruit juices as they are loaded with sugar.