



March is National Nutrition Month! Here's a Habit That Can Boost Your Health

March is National Nutrition Month®, an annual campaign by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics to highlight the power of food in shaping health. This year's theme, "Food Connects Us," reminds us that food isn't just about nourishment—it's about culture, tradition, and community.

Studies show that sharing meals—whether with family, friends, or coworkers—goes beyond just social bonding. It's a habit linked to better nutrition, improved mental health, and even longevity.

Research from Blue Zones—regions where people live the longest and healthiest lives—shows that communal meals are a key part of well-being. In places like Okinawa, Japan, and Sardinia, Italy, people make mealtimes a daily ritual, strengthening social bonds while eating nourishing, whole foods.

The Health Benefits of Eating Together

- **Better nutrition.** People who eat together consume more whole foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fiber, while eating fewer ultra-processed foods. Shared meals encourage balanced, home-cooked eating habits that last a lifetime.
- **Lower risk of disordered eating.** Family meals are associated with a lower risk of unhealthy dieting behaviors, emotional eating, and obesity. Eating together promotes mindful eating, better portion control, and healthier food choices.
- **Improved digestion.** Stress and rushed eating can interfere with digestion. Eating in a relaxed social setting reduces cortisol (the stress hormone), leading to better nutrient absorption and a healthier gut microbiome.
- **Improved mental health.** Social meals help reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. Conversations over food strengthen emotional connections, provide support, and promote a sense of belonging.

- **Family bonding and academic success.** Family meals improve communication, strengthen bonds, and foster emotional resilience in children. Studies show that kids who regularly eat with their families tend to perform better in school and have higher self-esteem.
- **Heart health.** Social connection is a powerful predictor of heart health. Research links frequent shared meals to lower blood pressure, reduced inflammation, and overall cardiovascular benefits.
- **Longer lifespan.** One of the biggest lessons from Blue Zones is that strong social connections, including regular shared meals, contribute to longevity. Eating together fosters a sense of community, which is essential for long-term health.

Six Ways to Eat Together More Often

1. Make one meal a day a shared experience. Whether it's breakfast with family or lunch with coworkers, prioritize at least one meal together.
2. Start a weekly dinner tradition. A Sunday family dinner, a rotating potluck with friends, or even a virtual meal with loved ones can become a meaningful ritual.
3. Cook together. Preparing food as a group makes meals more enjoyable and fosters connection. Involve kids, roommates, or friends in the process.
4. Take your lunch break with others. Step away from your desk and share a meal with a coworker. It boosts both nutrition and workplace morale.
5. Join a community meal. Farmers' markets, cultural centers, and places of worship often host shared meals—great opportunities to connect over food.
6. Seek out local events that bring people together over meals. Many social clubs, networking groups, and community organizations organize meals, potlucks, and dining events as part of their gatherings. Attending one can be a great way to meet new people while sharing a meal.

This month, try making mealtime more social. It's one of the easiest ways to nourish your body and strengthen connections.

Gather & Share:

Build-Your-Own Grain Bowl



This is the perfect dish for a gathering where everyone contributes an ingredient, and it all comes together effortlessly. It's forgiving, endlessly customizable, and works with whatever is on hand.

This meal celebrates how food connects us—everyone brings an ingredient, and together, you create a vibrant, nourishing meal. It works because no exact measurements are needed, it works for vegetarians, vegans, gluten-free eaters, or omnivores, it encourages creativity, and is perfect for potlucks or casual gatherings.

Options for bringing to the meal:

- **The Base** - Quinoa, farro, brown rice, barley, couscous, or mixed greens
- **The protein-rich option** - Chickpeas, black beans, lentils, grilled tofu, shredded chicken, hard-boiled eggs
- **The Variety of Veggies** - Roasted sweet potatoes, bell peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, avocado, carrots, kale
- **The Crunch** - Nuts, seeds, toasted chickpeas, crispy shallots
- Don't forget the **Dressing**!
- **Tempting Toppings** - feta or goat cheese, fresh herbs, hot sauce, citrus zest, croutons, olives, dried fruit

How to serve:

- Set everything out buffet-style so people can build their own bowls
- No pressure to measure—just mix, match, and enjoy!
- If someone doesn't like an ingredient, they can skip it

This dish embodies “Food Connects Us”—a meal that comes together with everyone's contribution, creating something greater than the sum of its parts.