



Walk Kansas

a fitness challenge

K-State Research and Extension

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Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

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Build Strength at the Core

Core strength and functional fitness are current buzzwords or trends in the world of exercise and physical activity. Core muscles are those that run the length of the trunk and torso. These muscles make it possible for you to stand upright and move on two feet. They help you balance, shift body weight, stop and start, and move in any direction.

The greatest benefit of strengthening your core is to develop functional fitness. To visualize functional fitness, think of making your muscles work together rather than isolating certain ones. Exercises that mimic your body's natural movement will strengthen your core. Functional fitness increases your ability to perform day-to-day activities.

The most effective way to strengthen your core is by incorporating an unstable surface into your routine each day. You can start with something very simple. For example, try balancing on one foot, then the other, during daily activities such as brushing your teeth, standing in line or riding in an elevator. Adjusting to an unstable surface forces you to engage abdominal muscles and requires all of your muscles to work together.

An inexpensive tool that you can use at home or in a gym is a stability ball. It creates that unstable surface and, when used appropriately, can strengthen abdominal and lower-back muscles. Most stabil-

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Build Strength at the Core

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ity balls hold up to 600 pounds and can be used alone or with hand weights. You can also use an ordinary stability ball as an office chair to achieve "active sitting," rather than slumping or developing the poor posture that is common when using desk chairs. Balance ball chairs are also available. (See photo on previous page.)

Stability balls come in different sizes. Choose the appropriate size for your height:

55-cm ball for height 4'11" to 5'4"

65-cm ball for height 5'5" to 5'11"

75-cm ball for height 6'0" to 6'7"

• Written instructions or a video might be included with your stability ball, and resources are available on the Web. Basic guidelines for using a stability ball are available on the *Walk Kansas* site, *Steps to Fitness*: www.walkkansas.org/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=66

• Every aspect of our daily movement requires strength and balance. Our bodies work to keep us upright as we go up the stairs, bend over or perform many daily tasks. By improving balance and building core strength, you can enhance your level of functional fitness and protect yourself against injury, both now and with advancing age.

Are Portions out of Proportion?

Oversized mugs, 11-inch dinner plates, jumbo muffin tins, and super soup/pasta bowls are becoming the norm. So, what's the big deal?

Most people will fill a plate. A standard dinner plate is 9 inches in diameter, so the 2-inch difference allows you to consume 50 percent more food if you fill it and eat it all.

The USDA has established recommended serving sizes, but common marketplace portions are at least twice as large. Some are up to eight times greater than the standard.

In comparing serving sizes common during the 1950s to portions today, french fries went from 2.4 ounces to 7.1 ounces, muffins have more than doubled in size, and a serving of pasta went from 1½ cups to 3 cups. Nothing quite compares to soda sizes: Those increased from a 7-ounce standard serving to as much as 64 ounces.

Researchers have found that people

tend to eat most or all of what they are served, and when consumers buy a large serving, they tend to eat more at one sitting. The trend continues at home, where we have control over serving size, because we are accustomed to larger servings.

Large portions, poor food choices and less physical activity all contribute to health problems, but we can reverse this trend. Following are some tips for serving management:

- **Read food labels.** Check the serving size, number of servings per package, and the calorie and fat content. If there are two servings, and each has 200 calories and 8 grams of fat, you will consume 400 calories and 16 grams of fat if you eat all of it.
- **Adopt "half-in-a-box" practice.** Place half your restaurant meal in a box and have it the next day. Ask for a to-go box when you order, or bring a container.

- **Share a meal.** When eating out, order a second salad or an appetizer and share the entrée. At the very least, split the huge order of french fries.

- **Compare servings.** Increase your awareness of large portions. For example, a standard bagel is 2 ounces and counts as two servings of grains. A marketplace bagel might be 6 ounces.

- **Repackage.** The large size might be more economical, but it could encourage overeating. Repackage into single-size servings.

- **Use a smaller plate.** If you are used to filling your plate, choose a smaller plate.

- **Slow down!** Give yourself time to feel full.

Know what you are putting on your plate and into your mouth. Resources on portions and super-size meals can be found at: www.walkkansas.org/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=68

Pack a Healthy Lunch and Save

Bringing lunch to work each day could save you up to \$70 a month. Compare a packed lunch at \$3 to take-out or restaurant lunches at about \$6.50, and the savings add up quickly. As a bonus, when you pack your lunch, you can choose items you like and that boost your intake of nutritious foods.

Lunches should contain some whole grains and protein. Fruits and vegetables should always be a staple, paired with low-fat cheese or nuts. You also need a little fat because it provides that feeling of fullness. Yogurt is not a meal in itself – but it does make a great addition to your lunch.

Expand your creativity with packed lunches: Cook a little extra in the evening and pack it for lunch the next day. Prepare a large pot of soup on the weekend and freeze serving-size portions for lunches. Modify leftovers: Combine leftover lettuce salad and steamed vegetables with chicken or tuna in a wrap or pita pocket. Hummus, used as a dip or as a sandwich spread, is a flavorful addition.

Be creative with lunch choices so you don't tire of the same thing. Mix it up with a green salad one day (loaded with veggies, tuna, beans and dried cranberries), soup and sandwich another, and then switch to leftovers or the "half-in-a-box" portion to add variety. A quick, easy lunch could be a peanut butter and banana sandwich on whole-wheat bread, a piece of fruit and low-fat yogurt.

If you and your coworkers bring lunches to work, consider a weekly or monthly "shared lunch" event. Choose a theme, and everyone can bring ingredients for a salad bar, baked potato bar or pita sandwiches. Make it fun and healthy!

Did you know?

Hummus is a Middle Eastern food made from cooked, mashed chickpeas (garbanzo beans) and tahini, a paste made from sesame seeds. Other basic ingredients are olive oil, lemon juice, salt and garlic. You can buy it in the deli section of the grocery store, but it's easy to make at home.

Hummus typically is eaten as a dip with pita or other flat bread and vegetables. It adds great flavor to sandwiches and wraps.

Vegetable Wraps with Chicken and Hummus

Makes 4 Servings

Ingredients:

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| 1 | cup diced, cooked chicken (or salmon) | 1/2 | cup chopped lettuce greens |
| 1/2 | cup chopped cucumber | 8 | quartered cherry tomatoes |
| 1/2 | cup chopped sweet bell pepper (red, yellow or green) | 1/2 | cup hummus |
| 6 | thin, fresh asparagus spears (steamed, chilled and chopped) | 4 | whole-wheat flour tortillas (6 to 7 inches in diameter) |
| | | 4 | lettuce leaves or leaf spinach |

Directions:

- 1) In a bowl, combine chicken, cucumber, pepper, asparagus, chopped greens, tomatoes and hummus. (Add different vegetables according to the season and your family's preferences.)
- 2) Heat tortillas 15 to 20 seconds in microwave before assembling. Place tortillas on the counter and cover each with spinach or a lettuce leaf. Divide the chicken/vegetable mixture in fourths and spread on each tortilla, leaving at least a half-inch border around the edge. Roll filled tortillas tightly, tucking in the edges as you roll.

Nutrition Information per Serving:

Calories – 270; Fat – 7g; Carbohydrate – 31g; Fiber – 5g; Protein – 19g; Sodium – 320mg

