###### 10 Day Real Food Challenge: Daily motivational messages

Regular messaging during the challenge can help keep employees engaged and motivated throughout the challenge. You can use the messages below in an email, post on your intranet, or use the content to make flyers to hang around your buildings.

**Day 1 – Healthy eating on the go**

Create your own supply of easy grab-and-go options. While there are times when we may find ourselves resorting to fast food because it is quick, there are several ways to make healthier choices easier.

For healthy eating on the run, try these tips:

* Bring your lunch from home. Brown bagging it can save you money and allows more flexibility to personalize what you are eating.
* Cook extra food on the weekend to make weekday meal preparation fast and easy. Take a few minutes before the start of the week to wash, chop or prep veggies for a convenient addition to a meal or snack.
* Create a “survival kit” of healthy foods to keep at work or in your car. Include things like fruit, nuts, yogurt, veggies and hummus, or cheese sticks. Don’t forget to include a water bottle.
* Keep a well-stocked pantry and freezer to help make meal planning and preparation easier. Having items like canned beans, whole grain rice and pasta, frozen or low sodium canned vegetables, and frozen portions of fish, chicken or lean beef on hand makes it easier to put together a quick healthy meal.

**Day 2 – Focus on whole foods**

Whole foods include unprocessed fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, whole grains, beans and legumes. Incorporate at least one fruit or vegetable with your breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It can be helpful to look at what you can *add* to your diet versus take away. Try to plan your meals to include a couple of different vegetables and increase your serving sizes of them. For example, add cucumbers, fresh spinach leaves or sprouts to your sandwich, along with lettuce and tomato. Make soup and add extra vegetables to it. Stir-fried chicken can also include lots of vegetables such as mushrooms, peppers, baby corn, cauliflower, carrots and celery. Here are some helpful tips to increase fruit intake:

* Add fruit to cereal.
* Add fruit to a tossed salad (i.e. pear, apple).
* Make a smoothie with fat free or soy milk and fresh/frozen fruit.
* Add a piece of fruit to your lunch or snack.
* Keep fruit visible.
* Take some time and cut up fruit now to refrigerate and enjoy later.
* Still have that bedtime craving? Add strawberries or peaches to your ice cream, or peanut butter to go along with your apple slices.

**Day 3 – Plan your meals**

Planning healthy meals can reduce reliance on processed foods. Meal planning does not have to be complicated. Even a rough outline of options for the week ahead can help reduce stress around food decisions. Planning meals will help you meet your nutritional needs by including a variety of food groups such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and protein. Here are some helpful tips for meal planning:

* **Visit local farmers markets:** Farmers markets have delicious seasonal produce for affordable prices. Stock up on your favorite fruits and veggies for the week.
* **Research fun recipes:** It’s important to make meals that you enjoy! Meal prep your favorite nutritious dishes that will have you looking forward to eating them. This can also be a great opportunity to try something new.
* **Keep a well-stocked pantry and freezer** to help make meal planning and preparation easier. Include items like canned beans, whole grain rice and pasta, frozen or low sodium canned vegetables, and frozen portions of fish, chicken or lean beef.
* **Cook extra food on the weekend** to make weekday meal preparation fast and easy.
* **Understand the benefits of meal planning**: There are several benefits of meal prepping outside of nutritional aspects, such as saving time and reducing waste.

**Day 4 – The better beverage**

Beverages such as water, coffee, tea, and other unsweetened drinks are healthier alternatives to sugary drinks. Try to cut back on beverages with added sugar, such as soda or lattes and replace them with water; small changes over time are easier to stick with. Here are some ways staying hydrated benefits your overall health:

* Drinking water helps maintain the balance of body fluids: your body is composed of about 60% water. Proper hydration aids in digestion, circulation, creation of saliva, transportation of nutrients, and maintenance of body temperature.
* Water can help maintain a balanced diet: staying hydrated can help you feel fuller longer, aid in digestion, and speed up your metabolism. While water doesn’t have any magical effect on weight loss, reaching for water as your go-to beverage most of the time can help.
* Water helps keep skin looking healthy: your skin contains plenty of water, and functions as a protective barrier to prevent excess fluid loss.
* Water helps maintain normal bowel function: adequate hydration keeps things flowing along your gastrointestinal tract and prevents constipation.

Water does not have to be boring! Try adding fruit slices or a splash of 100% juice to sparkling water to make hydration more fun.

**Day 5 – Go whole grain**

Consume only 100% whole grains when eating bread, pasta, and any other products with grains. Whole grain foods are healthier than refined grains – they are high in fiber and contain vitamins, minerals, and protein. Look for the word “whole” in the ingredient list. White flour, rice and pasta are examples of refined grains. Here are some ways to include whole grains in your diet:

* For breakfast, try whole grain cereal, steel cut oats or whole wheat English muffins.
* Add quinoa or farro to a salad for lunch or include barley in homemade soup.
* Substitute whole grain brown rice for white rice for dinner.

**Day 6 – Read food labels**

All packaged foods have a Nutrition Facts Label. The labels provide valuable information about the quality of the food. Start by reading the ingredients list. Ingredients are listed by decreasing order of weight in a product. For example, if the first ingredient is whole grain flour, this is the most prevalent ingredient by weight in the item. Fewer ingredients, especially those you can pronounce, usually indicate a less processed food. Reading the ingredients list is especially important if you have any food allergies or sensitivities.

Look at the serving size and calories per serving. While our own personal needs may be more or less, this can give us insight into the overall nutrient content. Look for items that provide nutrients such as fiber, protein, vitamin D, calcium, iron, and potassium. Limit added sugar, sodium, and saturated fat. That doesn’t mean we can’t *ever* have foods with these nutrients. Remember, it is all about balance! Many factors play into our food decisions. You can use the Nutrition Facts Label as another resource to help guide you.

Take a look at this article from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for more information: [Nutrition Facts Label and Your Health | Healthy Weight and Growth | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-weight-growth/healthy-eating/nutrition-label.html)

**Day 7 – Eat mindfully**

Eat one meal per day with no distractions. Learning to prepare new foods and making different meal choices requires you to think about what you are buying and cooking. Why not spend some time focusing on the experience of eating your food? As you eat, pay attention to the taste and texture of each bite. Mindful eating leads to better eating habits and allows you to use all your senses to explore, savor and taste what you eat. Here are some tips on how to incorporate mindful eating:

* Turn off the TV and put away your phone.
* Eat at the table; don’t eat in your car or at your desk.
* Slow down while you are eating to better connect with your food.

**Day 8 – Incorporate healthy fats**

Healthy fats are essential for brain functioning, heart health, skin health, hormone balance, and more. Unsaturated fats are generally plant-based and are better for us than saturated fats, which are generally animal-based, or trans fats. Common sources of saturated fats include red meat, processed meats, full-fat milk and cheese, butter and cream cheese. Trans fat can be identified by the word “hydrogenated” in an ingredient list and are often found in baked goods. Try to incorporate more healthy fats into your diet. Here are some examples of healthy fats to try out this week:

* Monounsaturated fats: Found in avocados, olive oil, and nuts.
* Polyunsaturated fats: Found in fatty fish (like salmon), chia seeds, flaxseeds, and walnuts.

**Day 9 – Go vegan for a day**

Vegans do not eat any animal products. A vegan diet rich in whole foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans and legumes has several benefits such as lower risk of heart disease and prevention of certain cancers. Grain bowls are a great way to try a vegan meal – start with a whole grain such as brown rice, quinoa, or farro. Add beans and roasted and fresh vegetables. Tie it together with a homemade dressing or hummus. See [Vegan Grain Bowl Recipes - Forks Over Knives](https://www.forksoverknives.com/recipes/vegan-menus-collections/grain-bowl-recipes/) for some recipes!

Try it out for the day and see how you feel! If this seems too challenging, start small by incorporating one or two meatless meals into your day.

Learn more about vegan health benefits here: [Health Benefits of a Vegan Diet (healthline.com)](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/vegan-diet-benefits#get-more-nutrients)

**Day 10 – Focus on positive nutrition**

Instead of dwelling on foods to avoid, focus on foods to include in your eating plan. Allow yourself to enjoy meals without guilt. Eating a whole food diet does not have to be all or nothing. Here are some ways to build and sustain the progress you have made so far in this challenge:

* **Try to reframe negative ideas around food:** You are allowed to enjoy delicious meals! Try to think of how you can add healthy foods to your diet versus taking away things you enjoy. A good place to start is by adding more vegetables to your meals.
* **Avoid skipping meals:** Eating healthy meals will help keep you full for longer. By focusing on nourishing foods as a foundation, you will be in a better mindset to listen to your body’s unique needs and hunger levels when deciding what to eat. Remember to stay hydrated as well.
* **Give yourself grace:** Every day is different. Tune into your own personal needs and see what feels best for you on any given day.

**Day 11 – You did it!**

Congratulations on making it through the 10 Day Real Food Challenge! We hope you had some fun while learning about healthy foods, mindful eating, and ways to properly nourish your body!

Here are some additional helpful resources:

* Excellus BCBS, nutrition content, [Health &Wellness: Nutrition](https://www.excellusbcbs.com/health-wellness/preventive-health/nutrition)
* Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), [Tips for Healthy Eating for a Healthy Weight | Healthy Weight and Growth | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-weight-growth/healthy-eating/index.html)
* Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), [About Nutrition | Nutrition | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/php/about/)
* Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) [Healthy Eating Tips | Nutrition | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/features/healthy-eating-tips.html)
* Blue365, health and wellness discounts for Excellus BlueCross BlueShield members, [Home Page | Blue365 Deals](https://www.blue365deals.com/)