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HEALTHY MEAL PLANNING FOR CHILDREN

Interview with Phillipa Barry, Nutritionist

“Eating healthy should begin from the womb,” says nutritionist Phillipa Barry, her first bit of advice to parents who want to ensure their children eat healthy foods.

Phillipa, who has over 25 years’ in the field of nutrition, enjoys sharing her knowledge of nutrition science with both adults and children.

Speaking about a presentation she did a few years back at the Ebenezer Thomas Primary School, she noted that while showing kindergarteners local fruits, she was disheartened that none of them could name any of the fruits on display.

“This showed me that the first and foremost step to engage children is to involve them in meal planning,” she said, adding, “Keep them close by, tell them the names of the foods, let them see what you’re doing and let them help out.”

She also said parents should be more creative by experimenting with different shapes and colours. For example, using a clothespin at the centre of a zip lock bag can turn a boring healthy snack into a butterfly. Another idea to encourage children to eat fruits is to cut pieces of fruit and use peanut butter or other nut butters to create smiley faces.

“Fruits are the brain foods, so having them for breakfast is ideal. That way, they receive the right nutrients they need to learn as they should.”

Phillipa also spoke about the need for parents to manage meal planning for babies at daycare. She emphasized the importance of expressing breast milk and sending it to daycare up to six months and advised to introduce vegetables first as opposed to fruits.

“If sweet fruits are introduced first, then that is exactly what children will expect and soon crave.”

In speaking about processed foods, Phillipa said, “Parents are leading children towards chronic diseases. They contain too much saturated fats, sugars and salts. They slow our children down, make them hungry and fatigued and constipate them.”

Phillipa's recommendations is to add more wholesome foods to the entire family's diet. Wholesome foods including fruits, vegetables, ground provisions, local meats, fish and healthy grains.

For picky eaters, Phillipa says parents should camouflage fruits and vegetables into what they know their children already like to eat. For example, fruits can be blended into smoothies and vegetables can be blended and added to rice or sauces for pastas.

As for the number one necessity when meal planning, Phillipa said water must play an integral role.

She said, "We live in a temperate region. The heat can affect the children's cognitive ability and overall comfort. Water replenishes what children will lose on a hot day."

For children who don't like drinking water, Phillipa encourages parents to place slices of oranges, strawberries or cucumbers in their children's water bottles to infuse the water with some nutrients and add flavour.

As for other tips on healthy meal planning for children, Phillipa said parents should use local produce and meats whenever available; make healthy substitutes; introduce children to a wide variety of foods earlier on; increase wholesome food while decreasing processed food; make food attractive; use glass or stainless steel to store their lunch; and encourage more water consumption.

For more information, persons can contact Phillipa Barry via telephone 542-6800.

The National Health Insurance of the Virgin Islands is working in tandem with healthcare providers to fulfill the vision '*Towards a Healthier Virgin Islands*'.

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NOTES TO EDITOR(S): Photograph is attached.

Caption: Phillipa Barry, Nutritionist