



Charlie Crist  
Governor

Ana M. Viamonte-Ros, M.D., M.P.H.  
Secretary of Health

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PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Jeannine Mallory, Public Information Officer  
PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT  
727-824-6908 (media only)

## *National Nutrition Month* **Mealtime is Important Family Time**

The most important part of your family's mealtime is...**your family!** With today's hectic schedules, family mealtime can be an important time for talking about the day's events and for staying connected with each other. Sharing meals can have a long-lasting effect on children, who learn by modeling themselves after their parents. Eating together as a family lets parents show their children, by example, how to choose nutritious foods, know when they are full and how to try new foods. Children also learn valuable social skills like table manners and how to carry on a conversation.

March is National Nutrition Month. What better time to enjoy meals as a family? Here, from the Pinellas County Health Department, are some guidelines to help with choosing foods to support good health for the entire family:

**Choose a variety of foods** from the basic food groups: meat, dairy, fruits, vegetables and grains. It takes a variety of food to provide everything we need to stay strong and healthy. Choose food that has lots of vitamins and minerals.

**Don't eat more calories than you use** because excess calories are stored as body fat. Pick portions that are right and balance food intake with physical activity.

**Be physically active every day.** Plan activities the whole family can enjoy, such as nature walks, bicycling or dancing.

**Eat more fruits and vegetables.** They're packed with essential vitamins, minerals, fiber and other that contribute to good health.

**Eat more whole grains and choose more non-fat or low-fat milk** or milk products – preferably three servings of each per day. Whole grains contain fiber and other beneficial nutrients. Dairy foods are an excellent source of calcium, protein and other vitamins and minerals that are important for a child's growth and development.

**Choose fats wisely.** Fat is a nutrient, too, but some fats are better than others. Choose lean meat, chicken and fish and non-fat or low-fat dairy foods.

**Choose carbohydrates wisely.** Carbohydrate foods like grains, beans, fruits and some vegetables provide the fuel we need to power us throughout the day. Be smart about your choices. Make sure your carbs have plenty of fiber, vitamins and minerals.

**Choose healthy restaurants.** Ask for nutrition information. Choose a restaurant that offers you a wide range of choices: low-fat dressings, nutritious side dishes and items that are baked or grilled—not fried. And make sure the restaurant offers children's portions. They are smaller and have been designed to provide the right amount of nourishment for smaller bodies.

Our **Healthy Choices Restaurant Program** allows you to select restaurants that offer healthy meal options for children. You can find out if your favorite restaurant is on our **Healthy Choices** list by visiting [www.PinellasWellness.com](http://www.PinellasWellness.com).

**Make family mealtime the best part of everyone's day!**

**For more information about good nutrition, visit [www.PinellasWellness.com](http://www.PinellasWellness.com) or [www.EatRight.org](http://www.EatRight.org)**

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*The Mission of the Pinellas County Health Department is to promote, protect and improve the health and safety of our community through public and private partnerships in an environment that respects diversity.*