***For the Health of it July 2023***

**Summer Wellness Series-Part 2 of 3:**

**Nutrition Hacks for Summer Gatherings and Beyond**

The time has come to embrace the season of adventure, relaxation, and rejuvenation. To make the most of Summer and maintain optimal well-being all year through, it’s essential to fuel the body with proper nutrition. But can you do that and still enjoy barbecues and summer celebrations? Let’s explore the PFC nutrition model, which emphasizes a balance of Protein, Fats, and Carbohydrates, and discover how it can be your guide towards a healthier, happier experience and a guilt free indulgence of your Summertime favorites!

**Protein: The Energizing Foundation**

Protein is the backbone of a well-rounded diet, providing the building blocks for muscle repair, supporting immune function, and sustaining overall energy levels. Replenishing the body’s protein stores is crucial to aid in post workout recovery and in maintaining your personal active lifestyle,whether that means keeping up with your kids, grandkids, or engaging in sports.

Summer meals should incorporate lean sources of protein such as grilled chicken, turkey, fish, tofu, and legumes that offer a wealth of nutrients without weighing you down. Remember to embrace the abundance of seasonal vegetables like leafy greens, tomatoes, and cucumbers to complement your protein intake. Get creative with colorful salads, refreshing wraps, or protein-packed smoothies to keep your meals light, flavorful, and satisfying.

**Fats: The Essential Elixir**

Don’t be afraid of fats! They play a vital role in supporting brain health, promoting satiety, and aiding in the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins. Opt for healthy fats like avocados, nuts, seeds, and olive oil. During the warmer months, the body craves lighter fare. Indulge in fresh salads drizzled with a homemade dressing made from olive oil and vinegar, or whip up a batch of guacamole to enjoy with colorful veggie sticks (and some protein on the side). Savor the goodness of omega-3-rich fatty fish like salmon, which provides a dual benefit of healthy fat and protein. Remember, moderation is key, so enjoy even healthy fats mindfully.

**Carbohydrates: The Sustaining Energy Source**

Carbohydrates are an essential part of a well-balanced diet. They provide the body with the fuel it needs to power through activities and maintain energy levels. However, not all carbs are created equal. Opt for complex carbohydrates like whole grains, quinoa, sweet potatoes, fruits and vegetables to nourish your body with long-lasting energy. Seasonal fruits provide a natural source of sweetness and offer an array of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Make a refreshing fruit salad or enjoy a colorful smoothie bowl to cool off on hot summer days.

**So What About Those Guilt Free Barbeques?**

Since Summer is synonymous with outdoor barbecues, picnics, and festive gatherings, it’s natural to associate these events with guilt or concerns about straying from a healthy eating routine. The key is to approach them with a balanced mindset. Yes, you can enjoy barbecues and celebrations guilt-free while staying true to your wellness goals.

First, decide in advance if you are going to pull out all the stops and indulge to the max or if you are going to maintain balance with healthier choices. If you choose complete indulgence don’t make the mistake of not eating until you arrive. Logic may tell you you’re banking your calories for the occasion but in reality, this will cause hormones to be out of whack and intensify cravings which can turn indulgence into overindulgence. Overindulgence causes bloat, discomfort and regret. Having even a good protein bar or shake before you go will ensure you won’t arrive hungry, giving you more control of the choices you make.

Next, *savor* your favorite dishes. Take sensible portions and eat until you’re satisfied, not full. Then, get up and get moving. Summer celebrations often offer opportunities for physical activity. Take a post-meal walk, go swimming or play a game of volleyball or corn hole. Don’t like games? Help clean up. Engaging in movement supports well-being and helps to offset indulgences.

Three hours later, if those favorite foods are still calling your name, make another plate, being mindful of portions and balancing with a variety of options -lean proteins, colorful salads, and grilled vegetables. By balancing with nutrient-dense choices, you can enjoy the flavors of summer without deprivation or feelings of guilt. And, with the PFC model, if you get off track, the opportunity to get back on, is just 3 hours away.

**Beyond Summertime**

While summer may inspire a fresh focus on health and wellness, embracing a PFC lifestyle year round ensures adequate nourishment to help maintain overall well-being regardless of the season. Prioritize balanced meals that incorporate all three macronutrients: protein, fats, and carbohydrates. Experiment with new recipes and explore the abundance of fresh, seasonal produce available throughout the year and don’t forget to stay well hydrated.

Foster a positive relationship with food and create a nourishing environment for yourself. Know that it is possible to enjoy the flavors and social aspects of an event while maintaining a balanced approach to nutrition. When at gatherings, allow yourself to indulge in the complete experience moments spent with loved ones, the laughter shared, and the memories created. Partake in fun activities, and soak up the light-hearted atmosphere. When the focus is on the experience, food becomes just one aspect. Wellness is about finding a sustainable balance that allows you to enjoy life to the fullest. By adopting a guilt-free mindset and incorporating these strategies, you can fully embrace the joy of summer barbecues and year round celebrations while staying on track with your wellness goals!

***JoAnn Begley is a Certified Health & Nutrition Coach with more than 20 years experience in holistic, mind/body therapies. She and her husband Jerry have two children and live in North Branford.***