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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 3, 2010

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MARCH IS NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH®

OKALOOSA COUNTY – The Okaloosa County Health Department encourages residents to use this month, National Nutrition Month®, as a spark to strive towards healthier lifestyle choices. This campaign focuses on nutrition education and on the importance of making informed food choices.

During National Nutrition Month®, the American Dietetic Association reminds everyone that an easy way to focus on eating better is to start with the basics: build your nutritional health from the ground up.

“By starting slowly and giving yourself a good foundation, you can work towards a healthier life,” says registered dietitian and ADA spokesperson Toby Smithson. “Change doesn’t have to be dramatic to make a difference.”

Smithson suggests ways to improve your nutrition from the ground up:

1. **Focus on fruits and veggies:** “Take a good look at your current diet and you’ll probably realize you’re not eating enough fruits or vegetables,” says Smithson. “Add a serving each day to one meal and increase it every few weeks. Adding more of these foods into your diet is important whether you buy frozen, fresh or organic.”
2. **Look locally:** From farmer’s markets to community-supported agriculture, you have many options to find new, fresh foods in your area. “This can be a great way to eat well and support your community at the same time,” Smithson says.
3. **Make calories count:** “Too often, people think of foods as good or bad and that only those on the ‘good foods’ list are okay to eat,” says Smithson. “When you’re choosing between options, focus instead on the one with more of the vitamins and nutrients that you need. Sometimes, foods with fewer calories aren’t always the healthiest options.” To figure out how many calories you need to achieve a healthy weight, visit www.mypyramid.gov.
4. **Test your taste buds:** A healthy eating plan emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat or fat-free dairy and includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans and nuts. “Those are the basics, but within this wide range there are always opportunities to try new things and find new favorites,” Smithson says. “Expand your horizons. Try a fish you’ve never eaten before or find a new vegetable recipe. By testing yourself, you might find new healthy favorites to add to your regular grocery list.”
5. **Trick yourself with treats:** “A healthful diet doesn’t mean deprivation,” says Smithson. “If you have a sweet tooth, have fruit and yogurt for dessert. If you want a snack in the afternoon, have some trail mix or nuts. There is no reason to go hungry just because you’re making healthful changes.”

For more tips on building your healthful diet from the ground up, during National Nutrition Month® and all year long, visit www.eatright.org and click on “For the Public.”

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