This year’s National Nutrition Month was celebrated in March. The theme was Personalize Your Plate, as there is no one-size-fits-all approach to nutrition and health. We are all unique with different bodies, goals, backgrounds and tastes! Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDN) Day was also recognized to encourage consulting a RDN to help tailor a healthful eating plan that is as special as you are. Learn more at: https://sm.eatright.org/NNMinfo

**PERSONALIZE YOUR PLATE**

Simple nutrition tip: Fill 1/2 your plate with fruit and veggies!

**HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES PROVIDED AT SCHOOL (STAFF REPORTED)**

Percentage of responses by Santa Barbara County public school staff on the extent to which they agree their school provides students with healthy food choices, by type of school. 2016-17

**RETHINK YOUR DRINK DAY WAS MARCH 17**

It’s estimated 44.8% of children ages 2-17 in Santa Barbara County drink one or more sodas or other sugar-sweetened beverages per day. Here is a great recipe for Strawberry Mango Agua Frescas.

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month, an opportunity to share the importance of individuals and communities working together to keep families safe and healthy. The Santa Barbara County Child Abuse Prevention Council is a collaborative group of committed individuals who come together each month to coordinate prevention and early intervention efforts on behalf of children, youth, and families in our community.

Our primary child abuse prevention strategy centers on strengthening families and building awareness about the dangers of toxic stress. Each of us has a role to play in ensuring the safety of our children. We all have various capacities to engage, whether we are a concerned neighbor, a family member, a parent, a provider, an elected official or work with a community-based organization.

COVID-19 has disrupted our whole community. We are collectively experiencing social, emotional, and psychological distress. The added stress that parents are experiencing can lead to added stress for children. Without support, that stress can become toxic and negatively affect children's developing brains and bodies, resulting in poor relationship skills, challenging behaviors, and learning difficulties. Two of the major risk factors leading to child abuse and neglect are family isolation and stress. The current pandemic, with its social distancing requirements, has increased vulnerability and left families without social supports. During the month of April, you are invited to take action to strengthen your social connections, protect our children, and help our community heal.

**Everyday actions to build social connections**

- Share your knowledge of community resources
- Talk to children and listen to what they have to say
- Take a moment to connect with a family member or friend
- Surround yourself with people who make you feel confident
- Be sensitive when people are in crisis
- Talk about what gives you hope
- Take a moment to express gratitude to your support system
- Volunteer your time
- Find someone to talk to when you need support

Children are incredibly resilient with the support of consistent, caring adults. When the well-being of children and families becomes the priority of everyone in a community, child abuse and neglect cases will decrease.
It is well understood that smoking is bad for you. Smoking leads to disease and disability, and harms nearly every organ of the body (1). In fact, smoking is the leading cause of preventable death.

The health effects of smoking are dangerous enough on their own, but are especially concerning during the COVID-19 pandemic given that COVID-19 is a respiratory virus that primarily attacks the lungs. Smoking and vaping damage lung tissue and weaken the body’s immune system, putting you at greater risk for getting COVID-19 and having severe symptoms (2, 3). A recent study found that young people who ever used e-cigarettes were five times more likely to be diagnosed with COVID-19 (4). Smokers who get COVID-19 tend to be sicker and experience more severe symptoms, which means they’re more likely to be placed in the ICU or need ventilation, or even pass away from the virus (5).

While the research clearly shows how deadly smoking can be, tobacco products are highly addictive and challenging for individuals to quit. There is help though, the California Smokers’ Helpline provides free, personalized quit support, available in six different languages. To get support, visit www.nobutts.org or call 1-800-NO-BUTTS; or www.novapes.org and 1-844-8-NO-VAPE.

Living a tobacco-free lifestyle is just as important as washing your hands and wearing a mask, to protect yourself and the community from COVID-19.
REFERENCES


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