BLUE ZONES

"A woman's health is her capital." - Harriet Beecher Stowe

Cooking at home means healthy meals and family connections

Robin DeMattia

Special to Naples Daily News USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Staying at home for much of this year has meant more people are cooking and eating at home, and that has led to many

According to a Food Industry Association survey, 71 percent of people who have been eating more in-person meals say they "feel more connected to my family since the pandemic has started."

In addition, more than one-third are eating better, and 40 percent say their food is more balanced or healthier.

These outcomes tie directly to two of the Blue Zones Power of nine lifestyle habits: eating with a Plant Slant, and putting Loved Ones First.

"One of the silver linings from the pandemic has been people focusing on nutrition," said Deb Logan, executive director for Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida. "We encourage eating well and connecting with family as ways to live longer, healthier, happier lives."

In Blue Zones areas around the world, people eat less meat and more vegetables, beans and legumes. These foods are healthier than meats because they are less calorie-dense and contain less fat and sodium.

Eating well has long-term impacts on quality of life.

According to MyPlate (choosemyplate.gov), run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, around half of American adults have one or more chronic diseases that are often tied to their poor eating habits.

The tips from this site include:

- Focus on variety, amount, and nu-
- Drink and eat less sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars.
- Make half your plate fruits and vegetables that you vary.
- Make half your grains whole grains.
- Move to low-fat and fat-free milk or yogurt.

Get Cooking!

Blue Zones cooking classes are held and archived online:

BlueZonesProjectSWFL.Eventbrite.com

Blue Zones offers hundreds of healthy recipes: bluezones.com/recipes

Cancer Alliance of Naples will start cooking classes again in mid-November. Register to receive information. Find archived classes on the organization's Facebook page and YouTube channel:

STARability posts cooking demonstration videos weekly on its Facebook page: starability.org

cancerallianceofnaples.org

Find local farmer's markets, farms with on-site stands, farms providing delivery, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms, some with half price offers for EBTs: localharvest.org

• Start with small changes to build healthier eating styles.

Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida offers online cooking classes that present enticing plant-based recipes. Recent classes have featured tomato bruschetta, sauteed broccoli rabe, orange salad, and stuffed artichokes.

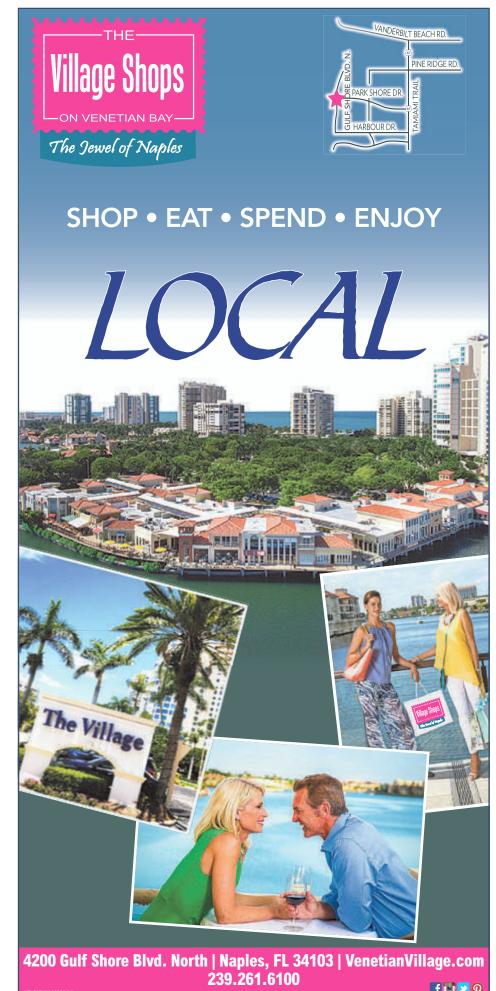
The main Blue Zones website is a great site to find recipes like roasted tomato and artichoke pesto pasta, easy Pad Thai, mushroom goulash and even desserts like chocolate fondue.

Two local organizations also help southwest Florida residents eat well by providing free online cooking classes and videos.

Cancer Alliance of Naples (CAN) presents the Food for Life program, which was created by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) and is run by certified instructors.

"Research has shown that there is a direct link between plant-based nutri-

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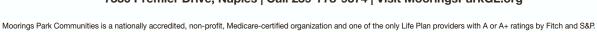
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Cooking

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tion and health and disease prevention," said Jodi Bisogno, CAN's executive director.

"I think that now more than ever, with what's going on in the world and people being concerned about getting sick, it's an opportunity for people to focus on their health. That is why we offer the program free to the local community.

Food For Life classes focus on flavorful plant-based recipes that have cancer-fighting compounds and immuneboosting antioxidants. The classes include cooking demonstrations and tips for making healthy eating a lifelong habit.

The program helps people living with diabetes, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, auto-immune disorders, obesity, and other chronic condi-

Though the program is usually held in person, since COVID started CAN has offered live demonstrations on Facebook and offered the four-week program through Zoom.

They have also expanded the focus to include healthy eating whether or not someone has a diagnosed health challenge.

"Healthy eating is so important," Bisogno said. "Every time we've offered the virtual class, we've gotten even more response, which is our goal. Our mission is to provide non-medical resources and support."

STARability offers cooking classes as part of its life skills program but, like CAN, has expanded its audience since moving the classes online.

"All our videos are pre-recorded right now and posted on Facebook, so anybody in the community can enjoy them," said Cayla Childs, director of communications and special initiatives. "This gives people the opportunity to gather their ingredients and cook when it's convenient for their families."

Sandra Smith, a retired clinical social worker, has taught STARability's cooking program for 10 years. She said her aim is "to make healthy eating popular, fashionable, and the thing to do." She does that, in part, by creating "beautiful food" and "presenting vegetables in such a way that they're hard to turn down.

A vegetarian since she was 10, Smith said she learned early how to replace



Jessica K. from STARability makes Peach-Blueberry Parfaits. SUBMITTED

oils and fats in recipes by adding spices and herbs for flavor.

Her recipes incorporate fruits, vegetables and a lot of beans. And she modifies favorites, like burritos with turkey and lots of squash, or pizza with less cheese and more vegetables. She's making Halloween cupcakes with half a cupcake, a tiny bit of low-fat cream cheese frosting and a lot of fruit on top.

Many participants in her cooking classes lose weight once they start making healthy choices, she said.

Her best tip, she said, is to "cut the protein in half and double the vegeta-

Online Power Nine activity of the week

Cooking and eating with your family is a great way to connect, strengthen relationships and downshift.

This week we want to encourage you to take some time and cook together with your family. If you have kids, invite them to help out. If you have relatives out of town, perhaps you can set up a time to grab your favorite recipes and cook together virtually.

Share your experience with us by commenting or by tagging us on Facebook @Blue Zones Project — Southwest Florida, or you can email us at bluezonesprojectswfl@sharecare.com to be entered in our prize drawing for a gift card from one of our Blue Zones Project Approved Restaurants.

Brought to Southwest Florida by NCH Healthcare System, in collaboration with Sharecare, Inc. and Blue Zones, LLC, Blue Zones Project is a vital part of Southwest Florida's well-being improvement initiative that encourages changes in the community that lead to healthier options. For more information about Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida, visit southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com.

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