

September – National Fruits & Veggies—More Matters® Month

A Message for Commanding Officers

The Navy and Marine Corps Health Promotion Programs focus on improving the nutritional fitness of our military personnel and their families. September is National Fruits & Veggies—More Matters® Month. The focus for the 2012 campaign is “All Forms Count”. We know that eating a variety of fruits and vegetables helps Sailors, Marines and their families get the essential vitamins and minerals that only these foods can provide, supporting them in maintaining optimal health and performance. But access to fresh fruits and veggies may sometimes be an issue, especially for our deployed service members, so it’s important to know that all forms count. So even if fresh isn’t available, they can still get their fruits & veggies in as canned, frozen, dried or juice.

As the fall PFA nears, many Sailors and Marines are struggling with weight issues that can jeopardize successful military careers. Dietary habits among active duty military members that can affect military readiness include skipping breakfast on a regular basis, consuming too many calorie-dense foods from fast foods and vending machines, and relying on dietary supplements to beat hunger for the sake of losing a few pounds or improving performance.

Research indicates that increasing nutrient dense foods, such as fruits and vegetables, is an effective means to weight loss. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, about 76% of the U.S. population does not meet the recommendation for fruit and vegetable consumption. In addition to supporting weight loss, consuming the recommended number of servings of fruits and vegetables daily also helps decrease the risk of various diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, and type-2 diabetes.

Navy and Marine Corps leadership support is critical to the success of promoting the increased consumption of fruits & vegetables. Strategies to support this initiative are:

- Establish a “healthy food policy” for command events which includes plenty of fruits and vegetables. Guidelines can be found at:
http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/hwi/downloads/healthy_worksite_food.pdf
- Recommend that every service member at your command determine their individual recommended number of daily servings of fruits and vegetables, which can be found at: <http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov/>
- Support the Fit Pick™ NEXCOM vending program by encouraging them to add fresh or dried fruits and vegetables to the vending machines at your command
- Support the DeCA “Healthy Choices for Life” program, which will be promoting Fruits & Veggies—More Matters® Month at your local commissary
- Assess your command’s nutrition environment by completing the m-NEAT Assessment which can be found at:
http://www.nmcphc.med.navy.mil/Healthy_Living/Nutrition/chow.aspx

Your leadership to encourage service members and their families to recognize the importance of making healthy food choices by including fruits and vegetables in every meal and snack benefits not only the individual, but the entire military population. We look forward to your support in this effort!