



Health Matters

March 2026



Building Balanced Meals Using MyPlate

Building balanced meals doesn't have to be complicated. The USDA's MyPlate model is a simple visual guide that helps families create healthier meals by focusing on five key food groups: fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, and dairy. The plate is divided so that half is filled with fruits and vegetables, one quarter with grains (preferably whole grains), and one quarter with lean protein. A serving of dairy or a fortified alternative rounds out the meal. This simple framework makes it easier to picture what a nutritious meal should look like without counting calories or tracking complicated numbers. Filling half your plate with fruits and vegetables provides essential vitamins, minerals, and fiber that support heart health, digestion, and immune function. Choosing whole grains, such as brown rice,

whole wheat bread, or oatmeal; adds fiber that helps you feel full longer and supports steady energy levels. Lean protein options like chicken, fish, beans, eggs, tofu, and nuts help build and repair muscles. Dairy foods such as milk, yogurt, and cheese provide calcium and vitamin D for strong bones. Small changes, like switching from white bread to whole grain or adding a side salad to dinner, can make a big difference over time.

MyPlate is also flexible and can fit many cultural traditions, food preferences, and budgets. Frozen or canned fruits and vegetables (with little to no added salt or sugar) are nutritious and often more affordable options. Families can involve children in meal planning and grocery shopping to build healthy habits early. By using MyPlate as a guide, individuals can create balanced meals that support long-term health and well-being; one plate at a time. Small, gradual changes can make balanced eating feel more manageable and sustainable. By making simple swaps, like selecting whole grains or adding one more vegetable, families can take practical steps toward improved nutrition and balanced portions.

<https://www.myplate.gov/>

National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week

National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week is a national health observance held each March that focus on sharing accurate, science-based information about alcohol, drugs, and addiction. Led by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), this week encourages honest conversations and helps correct common myths and misunderstandings about substance use. The goal is to provide reliable information so individuals and communities can make informed, healthier decisions.

Misinformation about drugs and alcohol can increase risk, contribute to stigma, and prevent people from seeking help. National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week highlights how substances affect the brain and body, explains the difference between use, misuse, and addiction, and emphasizes the increased dangers of mixing substances. By focusing on facts rather than fear, this observance supports education and prevention efforts for people of all ages.

National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week also promotes open dialogue between youth, families, educators, and community members. These conversations can help reduce stigma, encourage early support, and connect individuals to trusted prevention, treatment, and recovery resources. Sharing accurate information is a key step in preventing substance-related harm and supporting overall community health.



<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/national-drug-alcohol-facts-week>

Important March Dates

Spring Forward
March 8th

First Day of Spring
March 20th





National Colorectal (Colon) Awareness Month

March is National Colorectal (Colon) Cancer Awareness Month, a nationwide health observance dedicated to increasing understanding of colorectal cancer and encouraging prevention, early detection, and timely treatment. Colorectal cancer, which includes cancers of colon and rectum, is one of the most commonly diagnosed cancers, and its risk increases with age, family



history, and certain lifestyle factors. Because early stages of the disease often do not cause noticeable symptoms, awareness efforts emphasize the importance of regular screening, which can detect precancerous polyps and early-stage cancers when treatment is most effective and survival rates are highest.

This awareness month also highlights modifiable risk factors and healthy lifestyle choices that can help reduce risk, such as maintaining a balanced diet rich in fiber, staying physically active, avoiding tobacco, and discussing appropriate screening timelines with healthcare providers. Experts now recommend that individuals begin routine colorectal cancer screening at age 45, or earlier for those with higher risk, because early detection substantially improved outcomes.

National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month is an opportunity for individuals, families, and communities to learn about the disease, share information, and support friends and loved ones affected by colorectal cancer. By spreading awareness about risk factors symptoms, and life-saving value of screening, this annual observance helps foster informed health decisions and supports overall Public Health.

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/newsroom/news-releases/2025/02/march-is-colorectal-cancer-awareness-month>



National Poison Prevention Week

National Poison Prevention Week is observed each March to raise awareness about preventing poisonings and promoting safe practices at home and in the community. Led by poison control centers across the United States, this national observance focuses on education about everyday substances that be harmful if used incorrectly, including medications, household cleaners, and chemicals. Poisoning is a leading cause of injury, but many incidents are preventable with proper knowledge and precautions.

National Poison Prevention Week highlights the importance of safe medication use and storage. Medications should always be taken as prescribed, kept in their original containers, stored out of reach of children and pets, and properly disposed of when unused or expired. Mixing medications with alcohol or other substances can increase the risk of serious harm. The observance encourages families and individuals to stay informed, read labels carefully, and know when to seek help. Poison control center offers free, confidential guidance to respond quickly and safely to potential exposures.



<https://poisonhelp.hrsa.gov/what-you-can-do/poison-prevention-week>

Events in Freeborn County

SAIL (Stay Active and Independent for Life) – Albert Lea
Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays
9 am – 10 am

Albert Lea Ascension Lutheran
1101 US – 69 – Albert Lea MN
1:30pm – 2:30 pm

Grace Lutheran Church
918 Garfield Ave – Albert Lea MN
Tuesdays and Fridays
9 – 10 am

Albert Lea Senior Center
1739 W. Main St – Albert Lea MN

March 5th Thu, 10 am - 12 pm
Needles, Pins & More
211 E Clark Street
Albert Lea, MN

March 17th Tues, 6pm - 7pm
Choose Your Own Book Club
211 E Clark Street
Albert Lea, MN

March 18th Wed, 10am-11 am
Coffee with a Cop
1031 Bridge Ave Albert Lea, MN

March 19th Thu, 5 pm - 6pm
3D Printing: Design Class
211 E Clark Street Albert Lea, MN

March 26th Thu, 4pm-5pm
Taste Test Challenge for Tween and Teens
211 E Clark Street
Albert Lea, MN

March 31st Tue, 4:30pm-8pm
Drop-in Crafts for Adults
211 E Clark Street
Albert Lea, MN

March 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th, 31st Tues,
6:30pm-7:30 pm
Nighttime Storytime
211 E Clark Street
Albert Lea, MN

co.freeborn.mn.us