

3-20-20 Survival and staying fit

As I went food shopping last Saturday, and witnessed what was available and what was completely unavailable or somewhat slightly available, I joked with a woman, “Oh great, now we're going to go home and gain weight or develop or worsen our hypertension, as we eat fattening and processed foods high in salt.”

While that certainly could be a possibility, considering that people were buying things like canned soup and there wasn't much of that left, I wanted you to know that there are other choices, better, healthier choices.

It was interesting to me to see what was still readily available. There were lots of fruits and vegetables. So, in addition to buying shelf-stable items to have on hand in case of a family's quarantine, I certainly hope that people are still buying fresh fruits and vegetables and doing their own cooking.

I had already heard lots of talk about soup, in particular, Progresso soup. (Maybe their stocks went up, when others were sinking.) In the soup aisle, where canned soup was kind of scarce, there were many other high protein nutrient-dense options available and well stocked. In particular, tuna fish, salmon and chicken are available, both in cans and shelf stable foil type pouches. Those pouches are available in small sizes for individual meals and larger family size pouches. They are high-protein, low-fat healthy choices.

Another category that was still well supplied at the store was that of nuts. I know nuts are kind of expensive but a little goes a long way for our health, whether it is as a snack or added to a salad. They are high in protein and healthy oils that we need. Eating healthy nuts is better than acting like one.

While purchasing fresh fruits that appeared to be readily available and yet searching for those shelf stable fruits for when we are quarantined, consider canned fruit with no sugar added and dried fruit. Dried fruit, such as apricots, can always be reconstituted with hot water and are great for so many recipes. Raisins are high in fiber, iron, copper, magnesium and potassium. Add them to your cereal, salads, or make your own granola. And of course, consider prunes, I mean dried plums. They provide all the fiber you need if you are quarantined and not getting enough fresh vegetables or exercise.

Most vegetables were also available at the store last Saturday. There were some frozen vegetables available but fewer than usual. Have you looked at dried beans? They are so inexpensive and so easy to cook. They are a vegetable that is

high in protein. Another source are the powdered forms of vegetables and protein that were intended for shakes. Even if you do not have a device like the Magic Bullet, these powdered proteins and vegetables can still be stirred or blended and used in cold drinks and in soups. They are shelf stable and go a very long way in this concentrated form, making up for what seems to be a high cost.

Eggs are another great source of protein and their use is so diverse in cooking. You can make the classic omelet or quiche and add vegetables or enjoy some home baking that almost always need eggs to hold it together. If the stores have run out of eggs, we have many people in all our communities selling eggs from their family's chickens. Those chickens are well fed, free range and their eggs taste wonderful!

Along with the bags of inexpensive dried lentils and varieties of dried beans, consider purchasing some rice. It is inexpensive, lasts a long time, and it will make a large meal out of a few precious protein and vegetable items you might have on hand. Cultures survived and thrived for thousands of years on foods such as these. They somehow learned along the way while surviving that certain combinations created a whole protein. Combining beans and rice is an example of two plant-based foods creating a complete protein. This can be accomplished in many ways such as nuts or seeds with whole wheat toast or hummus and pita bread.

Speaking of whole wheat, my son also recently went food shopping. (Yeah, he does that!) He intended to purchase some pasta but most of it was missing. There was, however, whole wheat, which he does not usually purchase. Then he remembered that this type was healthier and higher in protein, and so he purchased some. And it tasted good! Score!

We have enough going on without becoming less healthy while at home. Perhaps keeping our immune system built up will also help us to survive COVID-19 and fare better with the common cold and the stress of all that we are experiencing.

While shopping for healthy shelf-stable foods for you and your family, please consider donating some foods while you are there, if you possibly can, and being kind while at the store and thankful to those who grew the food in the first place and those who are working hard to keep the store stocked.

Survival and staying fit goes beyond the physical needs of health. It also includes kindness and gratitude.

Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for Halifax, MA. She can be reached at 781 293 6768 or cathleen.drinan@halifax-ma.org