

By DIANNE ALWARD-BIERY

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MARQUETTE — The Fit Family Challenge parents' second educational meeting was March 19 at Peter White Public Library. The focus was on meeting the challenge of making their food program work amid the whirlwind schedules of busy students and workday world of parents.

"The key is being prepared to make meals at short notice in the rush of daily life," said Donna Marlor, group leader and director of Weight Management at Marquette General Hospital.

Daric Christian makes meals work by adapting dishes such as chicken tortilla soup.

"I add a side of cooked shrimp to reach a higher protein level. Or sometimes I'll add a little (round) of Babybel cheese for more protein," Christian said.

Marlor presented several food items, and compared similar foods to illustrate how, over time, using a food with lower fat or sugar content can substantially affect calorie intake.

An example was a yogurt product packaged with chocolate chips or crunchy nuggets. The six-ounce regular version had 29 grams of sugar, the equivalent of more than seven teaspoons (based on 4 grams per teaspoon).

This was compared to a "light" yogurt which had 11 grams of sugar; less than half contained in the "treat" yogurt.

Another example was a cereal which touted weight loss would result if substituted for two meals daily.

"That works," Marlor said. "It's standardized meal replacement. The problem is the portion size. I don't know anybody who would be satisfied with that small amount for an extended period of time. And this one is loaded with sugar."

The typical chocolate Easter bunny was there also. The package nutrition chart listed 29 grams of sugar, and 260 calories for the 1.75-ounce bunny.

The group also discussed their efforts to make dining as a family priority, as well as adjusting former meal choices.

"I don't let the kids shop on their own, but they do look at labels more now," said participant Michele Thomas. "Rachel, our older one, is really catching on."

Thomas said it is more difficult with son Michael, who is physically "on the go" and requires more food than others in his family.

"They're making better choices than before," she said, noting that it has helped not having "poor choice" foods in the house.

Christian noted that his 7-year-old Aidan has no problem eating what is served, but that older daughter Devin, 12, had a few preconceived notions about food.

"They're now taking lunches to school, and she seems to be adjusting. We're trying to bring label awareness and a sense of proportion. Plus, my kids don't order off the menu anymore," he said.

"The biggest determinant of what kids eat is what is served at home," Marlor said. "Modeling of new behavior and nutrition is essential."

The families continue to pursue increased exercise and are taking advantage of winter activities.

"It's important that activities be fun to keep kids comfortable and interested," Marlor said.

Dale Thomas prefers outdoor activities and finds indoor running to be boring. "It's a transition," he said. "Outside is just more challenging and interesting than the treadmill."

Both families are looking forward participating in the April 26 Kids Healthy Day Family Fun Walk/Run at the Marquette YMCA.

The next challenge for the fit families? Tackling the PEIF rock climbing wall at Northern Michigan University.