



KAT NGUYEN

Rebecca Duncan makes a living by helping others make healthy choices in their diets and lifestyles. A Mechanicsburg resident, Duncan is a registered dietitian at Highmark, where she coordinates wellness programs for the Harrisburg Area YMCA, HealthSouth, Gettysburg College and other Highmark members. She also leads programs for Highmark employees, who can attend wellness programs on everything from good nutrition to stress management and diabetes prevention.

As expected, the refrigerator in her Hampden Township home is stocked with healthy foods. But, like any mom, her most challenging “clients” are her six- and three-year-old sons.

What are some items you always have in your refrigerator?

We always have organic milk, trans fat-free margarine, jelly, wheat bread. I keep the peanut butter in the pantry, but we always have peanut butter. Let’s see ... 100-percent juice, eggs, light salad dressings. I usually keep fruit in

a bowl on the counter, but some fruits, like grapes, are kept in the refrigerator. We always have a lot of produce, like romaine lettuce, spinach, carrots. In the summer we have a lot more fresh produce, but in the winter I buy canned fruit and no-salt-added canned vegetables. We always have yogurt.

So it’s a misconception that canned produce isn’t as good for you?

The canned stuff is OK, especially in winter. If you buy an orange in December that comes from Florida, it loses some of its nutritional value in its trip here. Canning is done at the peak of ripeness, so it’s a way to retain those nutrients. Get the no-salt-added varieties of vegetables to keep the extra sodium out of your diet. When you can, though, buy local, seasonal produce. Wegmans does a good job of this. Visit farmers’ markets to find local produce. They might not be jammin’ in the winter, but there will be something. Always try to eat seasonally. You can download a chart of seasonal produce from FoodTV.com or from other websites.

What are some of your favorite ingredients to use when you cook at home?

I really like onions. We like olive oil. I always have fresh garlic and the chopped garlic in a jar. I like to steam broccoli. We buy all different kinds of cheeses. My kids don’t like to drink milk, so we put shredded cheese on a lot of stuff. Hence the yogurt, too.

What type of meals do you cook a lot?

We do a lot of Tex-Mex. Nachos with wheat chips. Chicken — we eat a lot of chicken. We do chicken tacos, chicken barbecue pizza with wheat crust. My son really likes spaghetti, so we’ll make a homemade sauce. My kids also really like those flavored pork loins. I’ll make one of those with some couscous. I try to get them to eat wheat pasta, but sometimes that doesn’t fly.

Do you have a hard time getting your kids to eat healthy foods, or are they so used to it that they don’t mind?

They’re too young to know the difference. My older son will eat anything. He’s eaten things like curried pumpkin soup. But my younger son won’t eat anything. He’s really picky. I just keep offering [different foods] to him, letting him know they’re always available for him to try [laughs]. He eats a lot of yogurt.

Any advice for parents who struggle with picky eaters or kids who don’t want to eat their vegetables?

One thing you can do is mix wheat pasta with regular pasta, then gradually decrease the amount of regular pasta you use. I call it

weaning. We always drink skim milk. My kids like to make smoothies with frozen berries and other fruit. I take veggie patties, like the kind from Morningstar Farms, and slice them. I put dip in the middle and fan the slices around it to look like the sun. Dips, like ranch dressing, ketchup, honey mustard or salsa, really help with veggies. I put something they really like with something they don't like or haven't tried; I never try two different things at once. I try something over and over, like broccoli with Parmesan cheese or broccoli with spaghetti sauce, until I find something that works. People assume that because I'm a dietitian that my kids automatically love healthy foods, and I'm like, 'Come on.'

Do you ever cheat?

Of course! I eat Doritos, but I just try to balance. We love chips and salsa. We like ice cream, fruit popsicles. And Creamsicles — those are awesome! We'll order out once a week, too.

Are there any foods people would never find in your fridge?

I never say never! But you won't find whole milk, butter, cottage cheese — it's good for you, but I don't like it. We don't eat full-fat dairy products. I buy the light versions of cheese — not the fat-free kind. You won't find Crisco or corn oil in my kitchen. I was going to say bacon, but we do have that about twice a year!

What are your suggestions for people who've inflicted some damage on their diets during the holidays and want to get back on track as a New Year's resolution?

People always try to say what they won't do, not what they will do. If you make half of your intake produce, that'll push out the protein foods and starch foods, and that'll help with the weight. You won't be hungry. Every meal you have to think, how can I make half of this meal fruits or vegetables? My other suggestion is to "color your plate" with all different kinds of produce — yellows, greens, reds, oranges. Different-colored foods have different nutrients and fight cancer in different ways. Last, don't worry about cutting things out. Think about how to add things in, like activity.

Anything else you want to add?

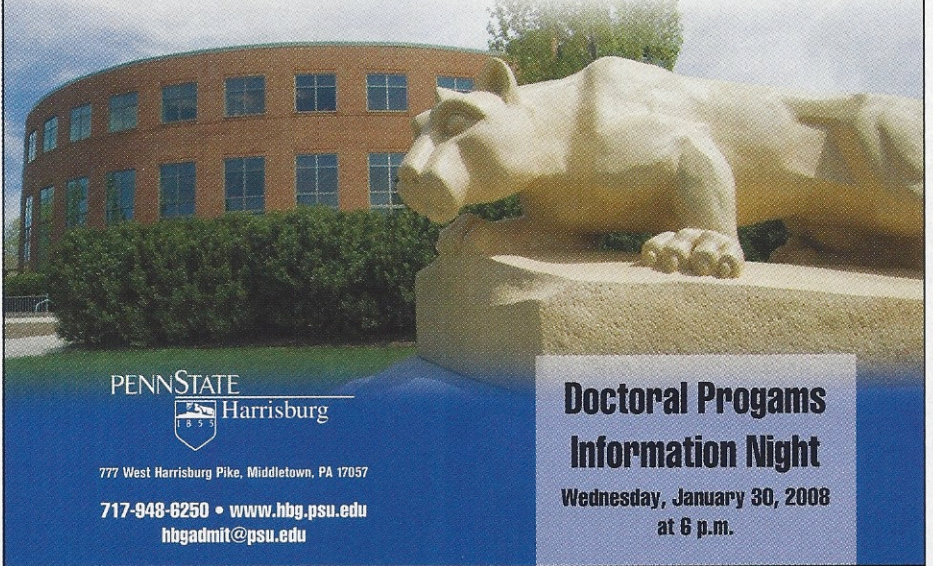
My husband asked me, "Is this your way of getting a new refrigerator?" I thought that was funny. Our fridge is ancient!

— STEPHANIE ANDERSON WITMER

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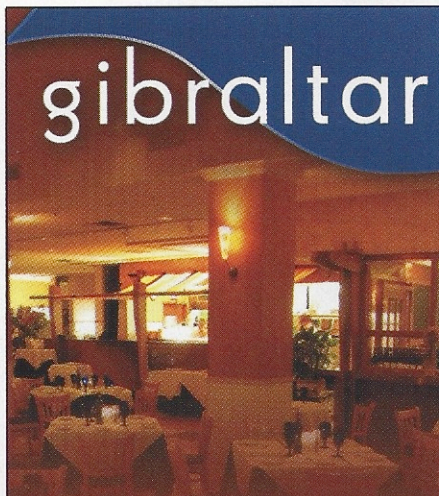


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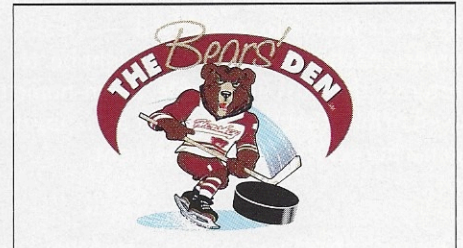

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