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Hello, I'm Vanessa Corwin

And, I'm Kathleen Kaan

VC: There's a lot of information out there about "healthy eating," which can be intimidating and confusing. Today's guests will give us advice that fits into real life—because eating well shouldn't be complicated. With us today are Nicole Roach, Lead Dietician and Certified Diabetic Educator, and Molly O' Driscoll, Registered Dietician, both at NYC's Lenox Hill Hospital. Welcome ladies, thanks so much for joining us.

NR: Yeah, hi, thanks for having us. We're excited to be here.

VC: Okay, so let's just dive right in. Tell us, we hear the phrase healthy eating. What does that really mean?

NR: I feel like it's kind of hard to say exactly what a healthy diet is because I think that means something different to everybody and I think that there's not just one quote unquote healthy diet that fits all. It depends on your medical history, as different disease states will require different things and different things will be healthy for someone with diabetes compared to someone on dialysis. And we also want to keep in mind different peoples' culture and their background and their preferences so I feel like there's a lot of things that encompass that healthy diet that we're aiming for and it's not just, again, that one size fits all.

MO: And, I think if we do want to dive into what is healthy eating we could definitely talk about it from a general perspective, just talking about the general say healthy average American we can certainly dive into what does a healthy diet look like for that person.

KK: Well, that sounds good.

MO: Yes.

VC: So, we hear a lot about the benefits of a plant-based diet. Can you explain what that is and why it's good for us?

NR: Yeah, so there's actually so many benefits of plant-based eating, plant-based foods. They have benefits for our heart, our cholesterol, lots of proven benefits for people with diabetes, in regards to blood sugar control. A lot of times plant-based foods are not as processed, they're more fresh, more natural.

MR: So, a plant-based eating pattern is one that really focuses on foods primarily from plants, right? It's in the name. So, this includes not only fruits and vegetables but also things like nuts and seeds, whole grains, brown rice, whole wheat bread, whole grain breads, quinoa and such and then legumes and beans, all that sort of good stuff. It can mean that you are completely plant-based. Somebody who is a vegan would not consume any animal products but could also be more liberal depending on what you want. Some people will consume eggs, some people will go for more vegetarian style, they'll eat everything but meat so they'll have

fish, eggs, milk and some people just abstain from meat so it could be various things. It just focuses on your diet being heavily of plants.

VC: How about organic foods? Are they any better for us than non-organic foods?

MO: Well, organic food essentially means that food has been grown or farmed without certain like pesticides or potentially been impacted or genetically modified organisms, or when you think of like cow farming, antibiotics or hormones are often used to kind of help fatten up the cows and get more meat. So, when you think of organic farming it's kind of free from those artificial food additives. They may use more natural production.

VC: Like what?

MO: They use no tilling or they use crop rotation as well to naturally help grow food without those chemicals or pesticides. And usually, those pesticides are there to help with pest control or to help them grow bigger and better. When we genetically modify organisms it's maybe to make them more drought resistant. I don't necessarily think GMOs are always bad. They can be really great. Parts of the world now use genetically modified rice to be drought resistant. It really helps those communities get food. So, I think it can be beneficial when used in the right way. And Nicole, please jump in.

NR: I kind of agree with Molly. I don't always think that buying organic food is gonna be the end all be all. Sometimes I think that people learn about organic foods and they think that they are super foods and that's what's going to help cure them of certain diseases or prevent certain diseases and while there's definitely benefits to them, for example in regards to produce, sometimes organic produce, they will just give you more anti-oxidants just from being exposed to less chemicals, which is great, but again, sometimes these products are a little more costly which is not always feasible for someone. But again, it doesn't mean that someone who has to eat something that's canned or something that's not organic it doesn't mean that their choices are poor choices, it might be what fits into their diet and their budget, so again not always the optimal choice for other reasons.

VC: `So ladies, what I'm getting from you is, there's no clear benefit one way or the other of organic versus non-organic, would that be a fair statement?

MO: Yes, definitely. And I think certainly it also depends on how people feel in their budget and stuff. I think seconding Nicole, if you can just get your fruits and vegetables either way, I think that's going to be wonderful for your health.

KK: Molly, we are often told to avoid processed foods. Then I read that there are different degrees of processed foods. Can you explain that to the listening audience?

MO: When we think of unprocessed foods, that would be foods in their natural state that really haven't undergone any changes. So, think about blueberries just picked from the stem. That will be really unprocessed, in its natural state. But you take blueberry jam, and, right, that blueberry is taken from its

natural state. It has maybe added sugar in it. Potentially if it's not natural, it has preservatives, sometimes they can even throw in dyes to make it more visually appealing and colorful. So, then the more things you add and change it, it becomes more processed. So, think of blueberries in their raw state, unprocessed, even if you cook them down or bake them or wash them and freeze them that would be minimally processing. Sometimes we buy frozen berries which aren't bad because often they're picked at their peak and frozen and they're still nutritionally valuable but then once you continue to break them down and turn them into jam—this is the example that I'm just using—it can take away and strip nutrients from it and add other things, say you added tons of added sugar and such so that would be something that then becomes very processed.

KK: Are there any processed foods, since we're surrounded by them when we go shopping, are there any that are good for us or not as bad?

NR: According to the USDA is any raw agricultural commodity that has gone through any sort of processing to alter it from its natural state. So, getting to your most processed item would be something we would call ultra-processed.

MO: And I think both minimally processed and ultra-processed can be part of a healthy diet. It depends on the person. Some people rely on ultra-processed foods for their only means of nutrition. I think depending on your situation all different levels can be part of a healthy diet and why, maybe sometimes we focus on minimally processed or unprocessed foods, because we don't have maybe those additives, you're taking that broccoli or that blueberry, even if it's just cut up or frozen or canned, it's still nutritionally all there. Fresh broccoli that's steamed has lots of fiber. If you break it down and make it ultra-processed, maybe put it in a frozen meal with lots of additives it could potentially lose some of its value.

NR: As Molly was saying, unfortunately there are some people who are totally dependent on these more processed items. They do tend to be cheaper, but there are ways we can kind of work around, kind of help fit those into a diet as Molly was touching on. So, for example canned food is considered to be processed, it can be on the shelf for a really long period of time because there is extra salt added. When we buy something in a can, we can always look for cans that are lower in salt, that can decrease the salt content, making it a healthier option. If we buy something that's in a can, for example, black beans, we can then dump it into a pasta strainer and rinse it with water to kind of help rinse off some of the salt, some of the additives. You can't get rid of all of it. It would depend on specifically what you're rinsing and how porous that item is but I think I read with like black beans, you could get rid of 30-40% of the extra salt in it which is a good amount.

VC: When we go shopping in the supermarket, obviously we should be label readers, we should look at the ingredients in everything, so what should we look out for that's good and what should we watch out for that's bad?

NR: Yeah, there's a lot on the label for sure. I personally get a lot of questions asked about the percentages that are on the right side of the food label so I always like to touch upon that. That speaks to the percent daily value that's based off of a 2,000-calorie diet. So, when you're looking at that it gives you how much percent of that item is coming from what you're eating and how that fits into 2,000 calories, and I like to look in that area

and to teach my patients and my clients to look over there because I feel like it's kind of a foolproof method. What might be considered quote unquote good or bad, that will definitely vary, but as to the percent daily value that's kind of a standard rule across the board. So, any time we see something with a percent daily value that's 20 or more we would consider that item to be high in that nutrient, whatever we are looking at and that anything with a percent daily value of five or less is considered low and then you can use those numbers to figure out what is important to you. So, for example, maybe you're looking for an item that's low in salt, that item should have five percent or less, whereas fiber is something we would want to have a higher percent daily value. We want to make sure we're getting in enough fiber so if we saw bread that has a percentage daily value of 20 or more, we could be confident that that's a good choice to make. So that's what I like, to start. What about you, Molly? Where's your favorite part of the food label to look at?

MO: One thing when you're looking at a label, always look at the serving size. So, I think looking at serving size is important for every need. You're watching your calorie intake, this has this many calories, that's helpful to know. I'm somebody who likes to eat three meals a day, I need about 2,000 calories. I like my meals to be around 500 or more and I have snacks in between so that kind of works for me. You can look at calories and all those other nutrients based on what you need. If you're somebody with high blood pressure like Nicole was talking about, you probably want to look at sodium.

VC: Back to what you said about watching the serving size, if I buy potato chips, let's say, I could easily eat the whole bag, but when you look at the serving size it says, like, two potato chips which is like totally unrealistic, you know what I mean? So having this knowledge is really good, but you have to really, or at least I have to police myself.

MO: Those nutrition facts can really be a good tool and also helping you create balanced snacks and also enjoy what you like. You can definitely enjoy what you love all the time and be mindful of serving sizes and still nourish your body.

KK: I have been known, because I love ice cream, to get a pint of Haagen Dazs, take two scoops and then melt it down in the water in the sink so I don't eat it. So, I have to force myself to make it inedible after I get my little fix. One of the things that Vanessa and I do a lot, and I don't really shop a lot, but this is going to help me to shop, but we go out a lot to eat in restaurants. Unless you go to a vegan restaurant or someplace where they say we specialize in plant-based foods, what's the alternative?

NR: Yeah, I feel like there are so many ways to kind of tackle dining out and try to dine out in a healthy way. Just being vocal and making swaps. A lot of restaurants are pretty agreeable to working with you but you have to kind of make that first move. The menu might not say, there's a burger on the menu but it's a beef burger that you are able to swap it out for a turkey burger or a chicken burger, or if the sandwich that you're looking at is a fried chicken sandwich, it might not clearly state that you can change that to grilled chicken, but lots of places if you kind of take that step to ask them they're more than willing to swap things out. Try to make swaps when you can. Things that say grilled, steamed, baked, boiled, usually you can feel confident that that's going to be a healthier choice than something that says, I don't know, creamy, crispy, cheesy, fried, battered. But of course, you still want to enjoy those things and when we're dining out it's a special occasion, we're

celebrating a friend or a family member. Or we just want to enjoy the weekend. So those times when you want the creamy, crispy, cheesy, battered item, a couple of good things to do for that, you could always share with whoever you're dining with. So, there's definitely some good things to do while dining out to still enjoy the food and kind of honor your body and try to be a little bit healthier.

MO: Yeah, I agree with everything Nicole said. You definitely want to enjoy yourself. Everything in moderation. Nutrition is not always just about the one meal you're having. It's about the long run. Your whole diet. They always say that a good rule of thumb is making one fourth to one half of your plate veggies so getting a salad or something. And then you can always make a fourth of your plate whole grains as well or any type of starch or carb and that way your kind of hitting all of those food groups and really just fueling yourself. Having that balanced meal is going to fuel you and make you feel your best.

NR: And sometimes too, planning ahead is really helpful. I know before I go out to eat I study the menu and look at all the options because I love food, I want to know what they have, but a person who's looking to eat healthy sometimes studying the menu ahead of time and knowing the options that are available to you, it just makes things easier when you're ordering in the restaurant, you might feel a little less pressured, you have to quickly find that healthy option. I've even had some clients I work with tell me they like to, if they're dining out with friends or family, if they're really dead set on ordering that healthy option in the restaurant, they'll order their meal first. That way once their friends or family are ordering they don't become tempted to maybe swap for that less healthy option. I think it depends on what you're in the mood for, what your goal out of that meal is because like Molly was saying, we want to enjoy the food.

VC: Now speaking of eating out (KK and enjoying), and celebrating, what about alcohol? We hear a lot about of conflicting information about alcohol, and for those of us who enjoy a nice glass of wine with our meal, what are your thoughts on that?

KK: And is it true that red wine is better than white wine?

NR: I think it still stands true.

NR: What's in the grapes, resveratrol?

MO: I think so, yeah. I think the reason why we consider wine to be a healthy alcoholic drink is that wine is made from grapes and grapes are high in antioxidants and one of them is resveratrol. They're really high in anti-oxidants or polyphenols which is kind of a bigger word but basically what that is, it's a plant chemical that's really good for us and they can act as anti-oxidants which are really good for just helping ourselves fight disease so those benefits in the red wine, in the grapes, can be beneficial to us. I know there's studies that say drinking red wine in moderation can be heart healthy because of these nutritional compounds in it. Nicole, please jump in, I know it goes back and forth. Moderation could be like one drink a day I believe is moderation?

NR: Technically for women it's one drink a day can fit into a healthy diet and for men they say that two drinks per day can fit into a healthy diet and would be considered moderation. And that one to two drinks per day that will depend on the type of alcohol so if we're talking about beer the serving size is 12 ounces. If we're talking about our red wine the serving size is five ounces and then if we're talking about liquor the serving size is 1.5 ounces. Just like with the food labels, serving size definitely matters. I think like Molly's saying; moderation is usually key to everything. I feel like sometimes people want this magic answer from dietitians and our favorite word is moderation. Specifically with alcohol I really feel it depends on your cardiologist if you're looking for these heart benefits. So always just talking to your provider and getting their opinion on these sorts of things. And then if you have someone that's interested in weight loss alcohol can sometimes give us what we call empty calories meaning it's just giving calories without any vitamins or minerals, not too many other benefits

VC: So how about white wine? Same story?

NR: So, I don't believe that the white wine has the resveratrol that is specifically in the red wine, I believe that's why there's that red color in the wine. I do believe that it has to do with coming from the red grapes, Molly. Is that you're understanding as well?

MO: Yeah. I think what normally happens with red wine is, it has that skin fermented with it in the red grapes that maybe the white wine may not have that additional skin in the fermentation. As dieticians we like skins and stuff because there's so much fiber and nutrients in them so I think in that capacity yes, the red wine may have a little bit more nutrients in it but I'm pretty sure that the nutritional content of both is very, very similar.

NR: Yeah, and definitely too, the serving size is still the same.

VC: Now, what about when we're cooking at home? What are some good cooking methods that we should use and what are some examples of some healthy swaps that we might want to make? Like let's say we want potatoes, but we say no, we don't want to eat potatoes.

KK: Is it true that a baked potato is good?

MO: A baked potato, yeah. A baked potato has lots of potassium in it, it has vitamins and minerals, antioxidants, even fiber if you keep on the skin. It falls into that starch kind of category, it's a carbohydrate. Carbohydrates are super important as part of a healthy diet, part of a balanced meal, they're our brain's preferred fuel source so definitely potatoes are good. And I guess a tip I would have is if you want to have a baked potato tonight, roasted potato, again, making it balanced, so add a protein, add a lean protein, add a vegetable, salad, maybe some steamed broccoli, this is where it varies depending on what your preferences are, you could steam it, add some heart-healthy unsaturated oils to it like cooking it with olive oil. That's kind of in a nutshell what you could do with a potato, how to balance that meal out. A good tip is always do meal plan. It takes out the stress and confusion at the grocery store, when you have a game plan going in.

NR: Yeah. And I think too when you're planning, thinking about what do I want to eat Monday to Friday, whatever the case is, for me personally I find it easier to have like a couple of staple items that I'm shopping for so rather than having a really different and unique meal every single night during the week I'll have a couple of things that I use for several different meals like whether it be the protein is the same, it's going to be a staple of chicken for the week and just preparing it differently, or maybe I want to use my vegetables coming from broccoli and spinach and that's going to be my staples. So sometimes the less items you have the less overwhelming it can feel so that could be a good thing to think about too when you're making your shopping list.

VC: How about pasta? Is that a good carb for us? Or should we be only eating like whole wheat pasta?

NR: In general, whether we're talking about bread or pasta or rice, I think they just got a bad name, for whatever reason. I know if we go back to the 90s when everyone wanted to be on Atkins, they wanted to be carb-free but like Molly said, they give you so much good fuel, not only for your brain but for your body. If we're not getting enough carbohydrates and we're working out we might have less efficient workouts so we definitely want to get our carbs in. Ideally choosing a whole wheat product like choosing whole wheat pasta over a plain white pasta, it would be more beneficial, it does have more fiber in it so that would be a good swap to make. It doesn't necessarily mean that you can't have the white pasta or like white bread or white rice. The recommendation is if you're somebody without diabetes, at least half the time during the week try to get your carbohydrates coming from those grains, whole wheat, so if you're someone who is willing to eat whole wheat bread but maybe not whole wheat pasta, maybe your half of the whole wheat can come from the bread and not necessarily the pasta. And if that's the case too, maybe just try to be extra mindful of our portion size. I think a lot of times too carbs get a bad name because we tend to load them up on the plate.

MO: They say about 45-65% of total daily calories should come from carbohydrates so think about that, about half or a little bit more. They are an important and integral part of a healthy diet.

NR: Even so I think sometimes people forget that there's carbs in fruit. So, all fruits are carbs. Vegetables. Yeah, even starchy veggies, beans, so many things count as carbs that we probably don't realize. And I feel that nobody's out there saying, gosh, don't drink milk or stay away from beans, it's like the grains get bad names, so when I think about my milk or apple, I don't feel like these negative feelings so try and apply it to the grains as well.

VC: So, carbs are kind of maligned a lot. But they are, as you said, really good for you. We should not ignore them. So, some people get really obsessed with eating healthy. So how can we just sort of get a clear mind about that, just set ourselves in a realistic mode?

NR: I think a lot of the obsession with eating healthy comes from the weight loss culture, the idea that we want to lose weight and we were taught that being thin is so good for us. I think if we kind of remove that from the idea of eating healthy then we might not feel as obsessed with it.

MO: Yeah, I agree as well. You can definitely be healthy at all different sizes and I think it's really important, like Nicole said, to have that perspective. Another thing too is just listening to your body and what you want as well, and mindfully eating, listening to your hunger cues, that's always super important as well.

MO: Yeah, and if you want to make changes to your diet you don't have to do it overnight. Like Nicole said, it's about longevity, small steps and goals, you don't need to change overnight and beat yourself down about not attaining those goals. It's all about creating small sustainable goals to make those long sustaining habits as well.

VC: Yes, this is great advice, great information, ladies. So last but not least, can you suggest some resources that our listeners can go to for more information and maybe some recipe ideas, stuff like that?

NR: Yeah, I personally love to refer people to the American Heart Association website and the American Diabetes Association website. Whether you have heart disease or diabetes, I just think that these websites are great sources for nutrition information and recipes, because both those specific diets, they have different aspects of just like a generally healthy diet so I think those are great places to look. And specifically for heart health I also really enjoy the Mrs. Dash website. So, Mrs. Dash is salt-free seasoning, we use it here in the hospital in lieu of giving salt to our patients. I always thought it was a seasoning but when I explored and went on the website, I found that they actually have different recipes that they pair with the seasoning that they sell so I thought that was nice. It's kind of like if you use this seasoning, pair it with chicken or fish but I really like those resources. What about you, Molly? Do you have any other go-tos?

MO: Yeah, I agree. I think those are wonderful; they are on my list as well. They have really easily digestible articles for people to read, if you don't have lots of prior nutrition education it's very easy to understand. I also like eatright.org, that is by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, where we get our credentials from, I think they're also a great resource. They take you through all the food groups and have recipes and blogs on their website. MyPlate by the USDA, that's always a great one too. We talk about it all the time. It's a really good representation of how to create balanced diets. I also like the Harvard, the nutrition source. They have their own MyPlate which is like the healthy eating plan and I also think they have lots of great articles on different nutrition topics that are really helpful.

NR: Molly, did you know that MyPlate, when we were talking about myplate.gov, they actually have an app that you can download for your phone from the app store?

MO: No, I did not know that.

NR: It's so fun. It's called Start Simple with MyPlate. And when you download it it's not necessarily as much about like portion sizes and what you would find on the website. It's more about setting simple goals for yourself so I really like that one too. You should check it out.

MO: I'll have to look at that, yes, that sounds like a great source. Just to add in, those are great sources, some tips to add in, when you are on the Internet searching for nutrition, just making sure you are reading

from credible sources, something like the USDA is great, all those organizations we talked about are all highly accredited organizations that publish research.

NR: And just like Molly was saying, be mindful of, lots of other websites out there can be such great tools. Anything that ends in dot gov or dot edu, dot org, when you see that we can be very confident that this is a safe, trusted source.,

VC: Yes, that's great advice because as we all know there's a lot of misinformation out there on the web and so it's good to really go to those trusted sources.

KK: Well, you guys have certainly given us some wonderful information

VC: Absolutely. Thank you so much.

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