

Food For Health

Nutrition Tips (Fiber!) From Second Harvest Food Bank

By Tara Fatemi Walker

How can we fortify ourselves in healthy ways? As nutrition education manager at Second Harvest Food Bank, Delia Bernal writes lesson plans that focus on making better choices about the food we consume. She presents lessons to people throughout the Santa Cruz County community, including children ages 5-17, adults, and seniors.

During presentations, Bernal strives to “... look at topics in a holistic way,” she said. “Our relationship with food not only depends on the food ... but also on our lifestyle and the motivation we have for choosing food. In order to make healthier eating choices, it’s helpful to have some understanding of the body metabolisms and systems.”

Bernal also conducts “food literacy training,” helping people acquire food-related knowledge and skills to improve health and nutrition. “Food is not the same for everyone, so we should be more knowledgeable and mindful about our personal relationship with food,” she said.

Bernal creates recipes based on food that Second Harvest Food Bank distributes, and recipes with vegetables that are unfamiliar to the community. “Sometimes I modify traditional recipes, adding more vegetables and/or fruits to make them more plant-based to inspire the community to consume more dietary fiber,” she said. “Fiber

is super important for healthy digestion, nutrient absorption, and elimination.”

At some food distribution sites, Bernal can provide lessons and/or demonstrate recipes. This way, people in need receive food and nutrition education simultaneously.

“Each distribution usually takes one hour,” she said. “We spend 20-30 minutes with food recipients discussing topics related to food and nutrition. It’s a two-way process as the community has its own valuable knowledge and experience when it comes to preparing local and cultural food.”

Bernal has served in her role for five years and really enjoys it. “It’s always rewarding at the end of any nutrition lesson or recipe preparation when participants thank me for giving them new ways to cook familiar foods,” she said.

continued on page 34



Delia Bernal in the kitchen with spaghetti squash.

This happened with a participant who is a long-time Second Harvest volunteer. He had told Bernal repeatedly he didn't like kale; he'd tried it many times and would never eat it again.

"Then, last year we had a presentation about fiber at the El Mercado farmers' market," she said. "The recipe we prepared was 'bubble and squeak,' a potato-and-greens torte featuring kale. After trying it, he loved it."

The following week, I received a message from him with a beautiful picture of a salmon filet on a 'bubble and squeak' bed with lots of kale!"

"Food as Medicine" is one topic Bernal teaches. "I believe and practice this idea of 'food as medicine' in my daily life," she said. "Foods we eat, along with when and how we eat them, are major sources of keeping us healthy. Or making us sick."

There are three processes crucial to good health: Learning cooking skills, food literacy – how much



you know about your food – how it grows, how it affects your health, labels decoding food, and how to prepare recipes with more vegetables. "Culinary skills are the foundation of enjoying and being more efficient and creative when preparing our own food." One last tip for good health from Bernal: Avoid processed food as much as possible.

Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County wants to expand its nutrition education programming. If you'd like to support the fundraising campaign to renovate the facility in Watsonville, visit <https://give.thefoodbank.org/ge/kitchen>

Recipe: Banana Crepes with Seasonal Flair

Original recipe by Raymond Blanc, adapted by Delia Bernal. This delicious, simple recipe is a gluten-free source of proteins and nutrients.

Ingredients

- 2 large bananas
- 4 medium eggs
- teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons butter or oil (for cooking)
- cup walnuts, finely chopped

Preparation

1. In a bowl, mash peeled bananas with a fork until puree consistency.
2. In another bowl, add eggs and whisk.
3. Combine eggs and bananas and add salt.
4. Place a nonstick pan over medium heat; add butter or oil.
5. Ladle combined ingredients into pan; cook each crepe 1-2 minutes on each side.
6. Serve immediately after topping with cranberry sauce and walnuts.

Cranberry sauce

In a small pot, add cup of fresh cranberries, 3 tablespoons sugar, and 3 tablespoons water. Heat to medium with lid and cook until cranberries have burst and have a soft consistency. Remove from heat and allow to cool. Blend and pass through a fine sieve to remove seeds. ○