

Healthy Dining New Bedford Good for You, Good for New Bedford



Many local eateries, like M&Cs Cafe Restaurant & Catering, have decided to participate in the Health Dining New Bedford program.

By Joyce Rowley

Isn't it nice to go out to dinner with friends to a place that has something for everyone? And with spring officially here, some of us are a little more conscious about sticking to a healthy diet to shed a few.

Eateries with the Healthy Dining New Bedford (HDNB) heart logo on their doors offer menus with healthier choices, says Kim Ferreira who runs the HDNB program for New Bedford Mass in Motion.

"Our goal at Mass in Motion is to create programs and policies to effect environmental changes that reduce obesity and chronic disease," says Ferreira.

It is a matter of options, says Ferreira. Restaurants may

offer substitutions of a salad or other vegetables instead of fried veggies and half portions or children's portions for adults. Menu offerings may include sides of fruit or veggies and no salt/sugar or reduced salt/sugar foods.

For kids, the restaurants will have one percent or skim milk or water as a default beverage for children's meals. And the menu could include at least three baked or grilled entrees too.

Ferreira is actively recruiting more restaurants to participate in the three-year-old program.

"There are a lot of restaurants who are already doing most of what we ask them to commit to," she said. "Pa Raffa's just added another vegetable to its menu and it works with a local farmer to have fresh vegetables."

To participate, a restaurant chooses seven healthy practices from a list of 22 options like taking the salt shakers off the table or offering one whole grain item on the menu. They then complete the application to Ferreira with a commitment to maintain the healthy practices they've chosen.

Kristen Raffa, owner of Pa Raffa's on Acushnet Boulevard in the North End, said their experience with the program has been positive.

"We love being part of the program," said Raffa, whose restaurant signed up last year. "It really works for us."

Raffa said that it didn't take away from what they were serving, but gave customers better options. And Farmer Steve comes by with fresh produce in the summer. He also takes their food compost-trimmings from prep work that would otherwise go to waste.

"It's so good when tomatoes come in fresh for the salads," Raffa said.

Owner Mike Melo of M&C Café on Belleville Ave in the North End said it wasn't difficult making changes last year when they signed up. Melo said it was more about giving people choices. Patrons can now split a plate between two people to cut the serving size and also cut calories in half.

"Instead of fries or chips, they can have a vegetable or upgrade to a salad," said Melo. Or customers can substitute baked fish for fried fish, or grilled chicken for fried chicken.

Destination Soups on Union Street, was the first restaurant to sign up when the program began.

"We were already meeting the criteria," said owner Devin Byrnes. "For us, it's easy. We always offered vegan and gluten-free options and we make fresh fruit available. People always eat healthy here."

"I think the Healthy Dining New Bedford initiative reflects the fact that people want to eat a more healthy diet. There is a natural progression for the country towards healthy eating," Byrnes said. "People are more aware of what they're putting in their bodies."

Waterfront Grille on Homer's Wharf is already there, too. Manager Bridget Phelan says that the menu hasn't changed much since they joined the program two years ago.

"So there's always been healthy choices. For example, vegetarian dishes can be prepared vegan," Phelan said. "For me personally, I'm very passionate about nutrition. It's great when you can go out and still eat healthy."

For more information on the ten restaurants that are in the program, or to join the program, visit Mass in Motion's website at massinmotionnewbedford.org/healthy-dining-restaurants/.

