

Helping Native Americans get healthier in the era of COVID-19

Written by By Dominic Aragon Sun Correspondent
Friday, 12 June 2020 07:02



You can lose weight, bring down your blood pressure and help your body fight off the novel coronavirus all at one time. That information was shared in a webinar May 30 to help Native Americans and others to boost their immune systems as the COVID-19 virus continues to ravage northwestern New Mexico.

A diet with plant-based food, along with other lifestyle changes, could help boost your immune system, Dr. Caroline Trapp of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine said.

Trapp is a doctorally prepared nurse practitioner (a nurse with a PhD) and the director of Diabetes Education & Care at the PCRM.

Trapp joined Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and other nutrition experts in a May 30 webinar to discuss the importance of boosting immunity to viruses, including the COVID-19 pandemic, on the Navajo Nation.

Trapp talked about the importance of including a plant-based diet with the *Gallup Sun*.

“Within weeks, sometimes days, we can get blood pressure down, blood sugar down, and we see people start to lose weight really quickly,” she said.

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Trapp said a “simple message” surrounding food would be to include beans and green vegetables in a daily diet.

“Beans are full of protein, full of fiber, all kinds of vitamins and no cholesterol. And all vegetables are good, but green vegetables are especially beneficial, and it’s easy to grow spinach and kale,” she said.

Trapp also said setting aside junk food and processed, commercial meat will help, too. She cited the crowded conditions animals are raised in, the antibiotics they are given to grow faster — along with the environmental impact — as problematic.

“I really want to encourage people to not buy meat in the grocery store, to not eat canned meat, to avoid meat at fast-food restaurants. That can go a long way in helping our health and the planet,” she said.

Lifestyle changes she suggests include stopping smoking and getting adequate sleep.

Trapp said for those who can rest more during the pandemic should maximize the opportunity.

“When lions are not hunting for food, they are sleeping. I think that that’s something that we should be thinking about, too. Rest is so important to our [bodies]. We’re often, in our busy time, not getting much sleep,” Trapp said.

FIGHTING DISEASE

About 33 percent of Navajo people have diabetes or are pre-diabetic, according to Partners in Health, a Boston-based non-profit healthcare organization founded in 1987.

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Carrie Dallas organized the event and is the Project Coordinator for the Native Americans for Community Action in Flagstaff, Ariz. Her connection to the cause is personal.

“So many people, even my own dad, he lost his legs to diabetes. So many people have diabetes and all they have to do is change their diet,” Dallas said.

“Quit eating processed foods, let go of the sugar and salt, and begin to eat healthier for themselves and their families,” she said.

Dallas said the webinar had the potential to save lives and show people how to apply the knowledge of growing plant-based foods.

“I want our people to live the life they’re supposed to live,” Dallas said. “Watching my dad live his life, not being able to get out of bed when he wanted to, having both legs amputated was just not a life that any human should ever have to live.”

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Sun Correspondent