

## Nutrition is Kellie Ashton's passion

Kellie Ashton (8527-1), Sandia/California's registered dietitian, has a passion for food and healthy eating. "You can enjoy eating healthy," she says. "It doesn't mean eating the same thing every day or giving up your favorite things."

Kellie became interested in nutrition after taking a class in the subject at California State University, Chico. She began college as a computer design major, but she quickly switched to nutrition. "As a kid, I always ate a lot of fruits and vegetables, but I learned that not everyone was like that," she says. "I became a dietitian to help others develop healthy lifestyles. It's a very individual thing; we can all enjoy eating healthy in our own way."

As part of Sandia/California's Preventive Health Team, Kellie coordinates the monthly farmers market (which will return to the California site in May) with her colleagues at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory; runs nutrition-related classes and events; and provides one-on-one nutrition counseling. Kellie also works with Sandians who have Health Action Plans that involve nutrition; for example, she helps individuals manage health conditions such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or pre-diabetes. Kellie often supports Sandians in implementing lifestyle changes so that they can stop taking blood pressure/cholesterol medications or even avoid starting such medications in the first place.

"I focus on lifestyle changes, not diets. A diet is something that has an end date. When it comes to healthy eating, you should make changes that fit your life and that you can commit to long-term," Kellie says. "Healthy eating isn't just about losing weight. At Sandia, I also work with people who are interested in nutrition to feel more energetic throughout the day or who are training for intense athletic events – like a marathon – and need eating strategies to sustain themselves for long workouts."

Those lifestyle changes usually begin with eating more fruits and vegetables and managing portion size. Kellie suggests using a tool like My Fitness Pal to increase your awareness of what you are eating. Virgin HealthMiles are available for using My Fitness Pal in connection with your Virgin Pulse account. "It's about mindful eating," she says. "We need to be aware of what we are eating and why and how that food makes us feel. Let your body be your guide."

If she has one single piece of advice, it's this: eat more whole foods. That means oranges, not orange juice; apples, not apple chips; baked potatoes, not instant mashed potatoes; and fish, not fish sticks.

Kellie will be coordinating several nutrition challenges in the Active for Life Fitness Challenge, which begins on April 1. There will be a Recipe Switch Up to challenge participants to remake a recipe with better nutrition, a Culinary Smackdown, and a brownies taste test comparing recipes with varying degrees of nutrition.

Also passionate about physical activity, Kellie has been certified as a group exercise instructor by the Aerobic and Fitness Association of America and teaches the high-intensity interval training and cardio conditioning classes in the Life Design Center (MO32).

If you would like to know more about fueling for your favorite fitness activity, Kellie can help you sustain till the end. Contact Kellie [mailto:kaashto@sandia.gov] for more information or to schedule a one-on-one nutrition counseling session.

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When site dietician Kellie Ashton received her security clearance, she celebrated with her coworkers by bringing in do-it-yourself yogurt parfaits rather than donuts.