

Commentary

National Nutrition Month: A Brief History

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The first National Nutrition Week campaign was launched in 1973 with a presidential proclamation, TV and radio public service announcements, news releases, and bumper stickers, all featuring the theme “Invest in Yourself—Buy Nutrition.” From the beginning, National Nutrition Week was enthusiastically embraced by American Dietetic Association (ADA) members as an opportunity to promote the profession as well as to serve as a vehicle for delivering nutrition education messages to the public. Armed with a promotion kit produced in year two, dietetics professionals went to work planning special events in schools, health care facilities, and community centers. Radio announcements and news releases gained the attention of the media. Newspaper coverage gave the ADA more lines of copy than ever before in the history of the Association (1). Items that would soon become National Nutrition Month staples—posters, table tents, and tray mats—were produced with the National Nutrition Week theme and quickly became the foundation for a range of National Nutrition Month promotional items that continue to be used today. See the Figure for a list of past National Nutrition Month themes.

70s, 80s, AND NUTRIBIRD

By year four, National Nutrition Week had grown dramatically in the number of members involved, activities planned, and range of consumers reached. District and state associations started planning their own local events designed to catch media attention. Many members began to take advantage of National Nutrition Week to launch their own public relations and nutrition information campaigns (1). In response to the popularity of National Nutrition Week and the public's growing interest in nutrition and health, the House of Delegates called for an expansion of National Nutrition Week to National Nutrition Month beginning in 1980. In *Carry the Flame: The History of the American Dietetic Association*, author Jo Anne Cassell states that, during the 1970s, National Nutrition Week was ADA's “most successful attempt to reach the public with sound nutrition information in a timely fashion” (1).

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Meanwhile, in 1977, Nutribird first appeared as ADA's “animated mass media symbol of good nutrition” (1). With a body shaped like a head of lettuce and a carrot beak, Nutribird was featured on all types of promotional items, from t-shirts to stickers. As spokesperson for National Nutrition Month, Nutribird appeared in TV public service announcements, radio spots, an educational filmstrip, and even on a recording of songs promoting good nutrition. Many dietetics professionals and student interns in the late 1970s and early 1980s donned a Nutribird costume to share healthful eating messages with adults and children. However, not all members were fans of Nutribird. Some felt that this was not the right image for dietetics professionals, and so after 1980, Nutribird's role in National Nutrition Month began to diminish.

By the mid-1980s, ADA ambassadors had become the spokespeople for National Nutrition Month and the Association. National Nutrition Month was growing, changing, and gaining a larger reach, especially with the media. New promotional items were introduced so that sales increased and funding was obtained for special projects such as public service announcements and a consumer hotline.

In 1986, National Nutrition Month received the C. Flag Award from the President's Citation Program for Private Sector Initiatives. That same year it was estimated that more than half of all ADA members were involved in some manner with National Nutrition Month.

ADA members became more creative in finding ways to promote each year's theme in a wide variety of practice settings. They were also able to enlist increasing cooperation and support from community groups. Each year National Nutrition Month themes were popping up in all kinds of places, including airplane banners, billboards, bus signs, milk cartons, and grocery bags. National Nutrition Month posters appeared in military institutions around the world—even in Navy submarines. In 1987, National Nutrition Month posters and table tents made their debut on national television when they were featured as school cafeteria props on the shows *Head of the Class* and *Growing Pains*.

INTO THE 90s

With the 1990s came a greater focus on consumer trends and effective consumer messaging for National Nutrition Month. Consumer surveys, including ADA's Nutrition Trends Survey, reported that although a growing number of consumers recognized the importance of good nutrition and health, they were still somewhat confused and uncertain about how to incorporate their knowledge into a healthful lifestyle. The challenge became how to move consumers to action (2).

The call to action came in 1992 with the theme “Eat

1973	Invest in Yourself—Buy Nutrition	1990	Enjoy the Taste of Eating Right
1974	Nutrition Saves	1991	Bite Into a Healthy Life Style
1975	Food Fads Fool	1992	Eat Right America!
1976	Improving Nutrition for the Nation	1993	Eat Right America! (Food Guide Pyramid)
1977	Nutrition . . . Foodway to Fun and Fitness	1994	Nutrition Fuels Fitness (Eat Right America!)
1978	Nutribird Says: Eat a Balanced Diet Every Day	1995	Discover Nutrition Anytime, Anywhere (Eat Right America!)
1979	Nutribird Says: Set the Pace! Take the Food Way for Good Nutrition	1996	Enjoy the Variety of Food Choices (Eat Right America!)
1980	To Hit Your Stride . . . Eat Smart	1997	All Foods Can Fit
1981	Pep Up Your Prime Time—Exercise . . . Eat Right . . . Enjoy	1998	Make Nutrition Come Alive (It's All About You.)
1982	Invest Now . . . Nutrition is Up	1999	Take A Fresh Look at Nutrition
1983	Say Yes to Less (Less Fat, Less Salt, Less Sugar) or Juggle the Foods You Eat	2000	Food & Fitness: Health for a Lifetime
1984	Everybody Wins With Good Nutrition	2001	Food & Fitness: Build a Healthy Lifestyle
1985	Food—It Even Sounds Nutritious	2002	Start Today for a Healthy Tomorrow
1986	Good Nutrition—Feel the Difference	2003	Healthy Eating, Healthy You
1987	Good Nutrition—A Personal Choice	2004	Eat Smart, Stay Healthy
1988	Choose Good Nutrition—For Today & Tomorrow	2005	Get a Taste for Nutrition!
1989	A Lifetime Decision—Choose Good Nutrition	2006	Step Up to Nutrition & Health

Figure. National Nutrition Month themes/slogans, 1973 to 2006.

Right America,” selected for its easy-to-understand language and universal appeal. To maximize the impact and awareness of National Nutrition Month, this theme would continue for 3 years along with the red, white, and blue logo. This theme later became the inspiration for ADA’s Web address: www.eatright.org.

Although industry support of special National Nutrition Month projects had been ongoing for many years, collaboration with McDonald’s on a project called Food FUNDamentals took the 1993 National Nutrition Month messages to a much greater audience through McDonald’s 9,000 franchises. This project featured toy food characters and nutrition activity pamphlets developed by the ADA in cooperation with McDonald’s. ADA members joined forces with local McDonald’s restaurants to sponsor activities and joint promotions during National Nutrition Month. To facilitate local cooperation, the ADA and McDonald’s provided a partnership kit containing a blueprint for organizing events and maximizing media coverage. Millions of children learned about the Food Guide Pyramid through the materials distributed with this program.

To address concerns about mixed messages and consumer confusion, the ADA joined forces in 1995 with key members of the food industry, other health organizations, and US government agencies to create the Dietary Guidelines Alliance. The objective of this unusual partnership was to “speak with one voice.” Using information from focus groups and consumer research, the Alliance developed the “It’s All About You” campaign to translate the Dietary Guidelines recommendations into five simple messages: be realistic, be adventurous, be flexible, be sensible, be active (3). The resulting core messages became the basis for a wide range of consumer education projects created by the member organizations, including the ADA’s National Nutrition Month. The central con-

cepts of this campaign can still be seen today in National Nutrition Month and other consumer nutrition communications.

By the late 1990s, National Nutrition Month had moved onto the Internet and corporate intranets. Members were sending out daily nutrition tips via e-mail during March and downloading National Nutrition Month promotional materials. The National Nutrition Month media kit went from print to CD-ROM complete with video clips of spokespeople. Media exposure for ADA members and National Nutrition Month continued to expand as interest in health and wellness grew. Special projects such as magazine inserts reached new audiences, increasing the visibility of dietetics professionals.

Through all of the changes in the past 33 years, the continuing success of National Nutrition Month has been dependent on an essential element—ADA members who enthusiastically plan and organize local events, both large and small, in multiple venues, for all types of audiences. Over the years, National Nutrition Month has remained true to its original purpose: “To increase the public’s awareness of the importance of good nutrition and position ADA members as the authorities in nutrition.”

References

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