

Waldrum keeps focus on community health

Eat your fruits and vegetables. A new study published in the journal GUT showed people who eat a plant rich diet have a somewhat lower risk of COVID-19. Wash your hands, wear your mask, be vaccinated and eat healthy.

Dear Readers: I had the great pleasure of interviewing Dr. Mike Waldrum when he joined Vidant Health as the CEO. The article was published Dec. 15, 2015. I was eager to catch up with him again after he agreed recently to add the challenge of being the dean of the Brody School of Medicine to his responsibilities. ECU Chancellor Philip Rogers recently announced the Brody School of Medicine and Vidant Health are working toward clinical integration and the creation of a new health systems brand, perhaps ECU Health, to serve the 1.4 million residents of eastern North Carolina. This time, Julia Firnhaber, a second-year Brody student, did most of the interview and her account of our visit follows.



KATHY KOLASA

I was curious as to how Dr. Waldrum ensures that he stays well while he's working so diligently to keep everyone around him healthy as well. His advice? Prioritizing taking care of yourself to better take care of other people. He said that this is his favorite piece of wisdom to impart on young doctors and medical students, but he also feels that this mindset extends to all health care workers and even to professionals outside of medicine. He also said that he believes you make the best decisions when you are prioritizing your health. And what are those top three priorities on Dr. Waldrum's list? A good amount of quality sleep, balanced nutrition and exercise.

Of course, we had to ask about his diet as I graduated from N.C. State with a nutrition degree, and after all, Dr. Kolasa's column is all about food, nutrition and physical activity. Waldrum said that he and his wife, Susan, try to take more of a lifestyle approach and aim for consistency rather than perfection. He says that they mostly eat at home. Growing up in the Southeast, he has eaten his fair share of black-eyed peas and collards, but confesses they aren't high on his list even though he knows they're healthy and should probably put them on his plate more often. We'll still consider him a true Southerner, however, because barbecue is one of his favorite foods. Although we would have liked to have learned about what type of barbecue he liked, we had a more serious conversation in mind, so that will have to be a question for next time.

I've heard about the growing scientific evidence recognizing a link between increased BMIs and the severity of COVID-19 cases. We medical students hear that the future may include other viral diseases and that as physicians we need to prepare ourselves and our patients. Obesity is recognized as a risk for COVID-19 and likely to be for other viruses. We have all heard that in addition to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, our country — and indeed, eastern North Carolina — has been facing an obesity epidemic for decades. Vidant Health and the Vidant Foundation have supported efforts to address the epidemic among its employees and our communities, so we asked Dr. Waldrum for his thoughts.

He agreed that it's time we take a new approach to tackling the obesity epidemic and this issue is absolutely on his agenda. He feels that we need dialogue and education in our communities around healthy eating, but his big ideas don't stop there. He also aspires to create a cycle of education, support and teaching within our communities. Waldrum and his team's current projects include clinical integration and launching a new brand, which will work to promote a regional transformation and student success. Regional transformation involves the promotion of economic growth among all of North Carolina's regions, through funding of various programs educational support. These missions will go hand in hand to educate and change the future trajectory of our community's health.

This is a nutrition-focused column, and I couldn't pass up an opportunity to ask Dr. Waldrum about where nutrition fits into the medical school curriculum. Dr. Kolasa has told us that even though we get very little nutrition training, the public places a great deal of trust in their physicians' advice. Dr. Waldrum was quick to acknowledge how important nutrition is to him both personally and as a tool he uses professionally. He also said that he feels the curriculum doesn't currently cover enough nutrition, but he doesn't think this is a matter that is unique to Brody School of Medicine.

I can personally say that Dr. Waldrum is very in tune with the students at the medical school, and although he is new to the position of dean, he has been quick to learn about the intricacies of each class and offer his support in any way possible. I think it bears repeating that an earlier comment by Dr. Waldrum who is dedicated to supporting the success of students and our communities on "our journey to changing the future trajectory of our community's health."

Professor emeritus Kathy Kolasa, a registered dietitian nutritionist and Ph.D., is an affiliate professor in the Brody School of Medicine at ECU.

Gochujang, the sauce you didn't know you needed

Move over, Sriracha — there's another must-have Asian sauce in town. It's called gochujang, and until I tasted this brick-red paste, I didn't know I needed it. Now I do, and I suggest that you do too.

Gochujang is a Korean condiment, and it's a flavor bomb. It's a shudgy, sticky, spicy paste made from chile peppers, glutinous (sticky) rice and fermented soybeans. It's sweet, smoky, salty and a tad funky, thanks to the fermented soybeans. A little dab goes a long way, adding umami-rich flavor and fireworks to sauces, marinades, soups and stews.

The first time I tasted gochujang, it was in a thick sauce drizzled over shredded pork in lettuce wraps. Since then, I've spooned gochujang into marinades and sauces for chicken, meat, tofu and roasted vegetables. Like other spicy chile condiments, gochujang is potent.

It's meant to provide a boost of flavor, not to be served straight up (but if you want to go ahead and lick a fiery spoonful, have at it). Mix gochujang with other ingredients that amplify its flavors and smooth its heat, such as soy sauce, rice wine vinegar and citrus juice, for a balance of salt, sweet, acid and heat. Gochujang is available in Asian markets, the international section of well-stocked supermarkets and online. Depending on the brand, the heat level will vary, so be sure to taste a tiny bit before adding it to your food. Once opened, gochujang can be stored in your refrigerator for up to one year.

Gochujang Chicken Thighs
Active time: 10 minutes
Total time: 40 minutes, plus marinating time

Yield: Serves 4
Ingredients:
1/4 cup gochujang
2 tablespoons soy sauce
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 tablespoon brown sugar
1 tablespoon finely grated peeled fresh ginger
8 bone-in chicken thighs, with skin
Kosher salt
Garnishes:
Chopped fresh cilantro
Chopped scallions
Lime wedges
Steps:
Whisk the marinade ingredients in a small bowl.



LYNDA BALSLEV/TASTEOFOD

Gochujang chicken thighs.

Season the chicken thighs with salt. Place the chicken thighs in a large bowl or plastic container. Pour in the marinade. Turn the chicken to thoroughly coat, rubbing some of the marinade between the skin and flesh. Refrigerate for 2 hours or overnight. Heat the oven to 375 degrees. Arrange the chicken on a grill pan, skin side up. Roast in the oven until a meat thermometer inserted in the thickest part of the thigh, without touching bone, reaches 165 degrees, about 30 minutes. Remove from the oven and let rest 5 to 10 minutes. Serve garnished with cilantro, chopped scallions and lime wedges.

Variation:
For a complete meal, roast the chicken on a rimmed baking sheet with assorted vegetables, such as carrots, butternut squash wedges, pearl onions or halved baby potatoes. To prepare, toss the vegetables with 1 tablespoon oil and season with salt and black pepper. Spread the vegetables on the baking sheet. Nestle the chicken thighs among the vegetables and transfer to the oven. When the chicken and vegetables are cooked, transfer the chicken to a serving plate. Stir the vegetables in the pan juices to coat and serve with the chicken.

Lynda Balslev is an award-winning cookbook author, recipe developer, tester and editor. Taste Food is distributed by Andrews McMeel Syndication.

HIGHLIGHTING YOUR HEALTH

Make avoiding falls part of autumn plans

Vidant Health News

With the official start of autumn comes a time to be aware of another kind of fall.

A fall is any unintentional coming to rest on the floor or ground and anyone can be at risk, especially older people. The negative health effects of falls increase dramatically at or above the age of 80, when a substantial number of fractures and spinal cord injuries can occur.

Statewide, statistics show the unfortunate effect of falls on North Carolina residents. Sarah Taylor, marketing manager for Vidant Health Home & Hospice and co-chair of The Eastern NC Falls Coalition, said many members of our community may not realize how serious falls can be. They are the second leading cause of unintentional injury death for North Carolinians of all ages, and in every year from 1999 to 2019, the No. 1 cause of injury death for individuals 65 and older. According to the National Institute on Aging, every year 30 percent of people over the age of 65 will sustain a fall, of which 10 percent will result in serious injury.

"There are several classes of medications that can cause an increased risk of falls, and though they can have an effect on patients of all ages, they can especially impact seniors age 65 and older," Conrad Kirby, adult nurse practitioner with Vidant Eastern North Carolina said.

Prescription medications, as well as some over-the-counter medications including antihistamines and supplements can cause dizziness, sedation and confusion, which could lead to a fall. It is important to talk to your provider about the medications you take and what side effects could impact your balance and awareness.



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Caregivers can help patients lower the risk of falls.

- Enroll in an obedience class with your pet
- Before hauling in groceries put your pet in a different room to eliminate trips and falls
- Leave a light on at night so pets can be seen when walking to the bathroom
- Teach the pet to sit when someone knocks or rings the doorbell
- Purchase a reflective collar for the pet
- Discourage pets from lingering in the kitchen during meal preparation
- Teach the pet to stay at the top or bottom of the steps until everyone is off the stair case
- Keeping up with vision checks with your eye doctor is one of most important ways of staying ahead of potential

"Pets are part of the family, but in terms of falls, pets can also be a danger to the safety of humans," said Taylor. "It is crucial to keep them from getting entangled in your legs and causing a fall."

There are certain tasks you can perform that can protect both pets and the people who love them:

LEARN MORE

For more information about resources regarding falls prevention visit ncfallsprevention.org/. For more about exercise and wellness services, visit vidanthealth.com/services/wellness-prevention/.

falling risks," Kirby said. "Also, regular physical activity, proper diet and avoidance of excessive alcohol use can help you stay safe and reduce your risk for injury."

Glen Newman, a physical therapist for Vidant Health added, "Preventative measures like exercise can help strengthen the body. Certain exercises which help build strength and balance can help you avoid falls." It is recommended to do some strengthening exercises as least twice a week to maintain independence and coordination. In terms of how community members can take further steps, Kirby suggests they talk to their doctor if experiencing situations where they feel vulnerable to a potential fall. He recommends having an examination by a physical therapist either through a referral or visit an outpatient physical therapist to get the best advice on assistive devices to reduce falls like a cane, rolling walker or rollator.

Highlighting Your Health is an educational segment courtesy of Vidant Health, a mission-driven, 1,705-bed health system that annually serves a region of more than 1.4 million people in 29 eastern North Carolina counties.