

Food as medicine.

Welcome to SBH Bronx Health Talk produced by SBH Health System and broadcast from St. Barnabas Hospital in the Bronx. I'm Steven Clark.

What if you could continue to eat your favorite foods? You know the foods you grew up with and love and through some kind of divine intervention could make them healthy and good for you. Well, fortunately you can, because of people like Emily Schlag, a registered dietitian and chef, and director of the SBH Teaching Kitchen who's providing hands-on instruction for people in the Bronx on how to eat well and healthy at the same time, welcome Emily.

Thanks, Steve. Thanks for joining us. So you've been here in the Bronx about a year now. How would you describe the diet of the community?

Now, how would you describe the diets of the community?

You know, I think it's really varied. We do have a very diverse community here, but I think overall from what our Community members have said is they struggle a lot with. There are portions of starchy foods like having a lot a large portion of things like rice and they also struggle with the amount of sugar and sodium often found in their foods, and that could be either their cultural foods so you know we have a lot of folks around here that are Caribbean, they're Dominican or Puerto Rican. I have a lot of Jamaican folks that joined the classes, and overall a lot of them, you know, struggle with sugar and salt and they also just struggle with what's available to them in the neighborhood as well, which is often fast food or more processed foods. They don't have a lot of readily available, you know, quote unquote healthier foods available to them in the neighborhood.

So when people take your class what do they say to you? Are they surprised that they can eat the foods they like and it can actually be healthy for him?

They are. We actually had kind of a breakthrough moment in a Class a few weeks ago. We were making chorizo tacos and we had a woman in our class who's Mexican, so she's very familiar with this food. When she saw the recipe she was like I thought we were making healthy food here and once she saw how we made the dish you know we did half pork, half turkey. We made our own seasoning blend with less sodium. We use, you know whole grain, a corn tortilla which is whole grain and we explained how it can be healthy like her mind was blown and she was so excited to realize that she could have foods that she loved in a way that we're still going to be good for her.

So it really doesn't take much to take a relatively unhealthy dish and make it healthy.

No, I don't think so. I think you know, once you kind of know what you're doing. Once you know the techniques for, say, lowering sodium, or you know what types of whole grains to look for, or tips on

lowering the saturated fat in a meal, it's really not too difficult to make sure that you're getting great nutrition from a meal.

Now for your classes, which I know you've been teaching for several months now, do you have to be an experienced cook in order to take a class?

No, not at all. We get folks that come in that, you know, have never cooked, never really held a knife before or honestly, are really nervous and they will give you as much attention in class as you need. So if you're a star, the chef will leave you alone. Let you follow the recipe as needed, but if you need more help we will walk you through every step of the way with our recipes.

And again, these classes are very inexpensive, right?

Yes, there are only \$5 each, so I like to say it's less than getting dinner for takeout.

And you get dinner too though, right?

Yes, so we let up. In the classes, everybody cooks a complete meal, so we often have four complete dinners that are made in class and we let everybody take home a sampling of all the meals created in class, which when you add it all up does end up being at least one full meal for every participant in class.

So it's a really good deal.

I think so.

What what is I know, you know, you talk about from a corporate perspective, but but what is the mission of the teaching kitchen? What do you hope to? What goals do you hope to reach both short and long term?

I would say our main goal is to empower our community to see that they are able to make healthy, nutritious meals for themselves. With the foods that are available to them, because that is a lot of people feel very limited in their options. But when you teach them how to cook, their options really open up and that's what I want. I want someone to be excited to cook a healthy meal for themselves and feel like it's not that difficult to do. Do you know long term? I would love to see some kind of impact on better food access in the community and helping with things like food insecurity as well. Because good nutrition and health is really hard to achieve when you do have limited access to food. So in the short term you know we help people make do with what they have, but in the long term I would love to see you know better changes overall in the community.

So tell us, what are some of the classes that you have earmarked for your fall schedule?

So in the fall I can tell you in November we're running some healthy dessert classes where we show people how to make desserts that are either lower in sugar or lower in fat or higher in whole grains. We also have, I believe, another vegetarian class coming up where we show people how to make delicious vegetarian meals that are going to have plenty of protein in them and all of the other nutrients that we need as well, while not having any meat. And then and then we also have a number of Thanksgiving classes coming up. You know, Thanksgiving is a really stressful time. You know, all of a sudden we realized we have all of these things that we need to cook, and sometimes people that have never cooked before I get thrown, you know, into making Thanksgiving dinner. So we're gonna have a couple classes that show people some of the classics and some new ideas as well for the dinner table.

We all love desserts. What are some of the desserts that you'll be making?

So I would say the number one favorite dessert are the black bean brownies that we make. They're really fun. People see the name and you know, kind of make a face at them. But basically, all of the brownie ingredients get blended together just in the blender or food processor and then poured into muffin tins to create nice individual servings of those brownies. The black beans are giving us protein in there. They're giving fiber and they also allow us to make the batter flour free so they actually gluten free as well and just have a delicious you know. Fudgy chocolatey flavor people love them and I think they're easier to make than regular brownies, but we also have some fruit based ice creams that we make that are dairy free and sugar free. We do a nice fall apple crisp and some oatmeal cookies as well.

That sounds very good. I mean maybe not that but but you're telling me it's healthy even though my my thinking would be maybe not so healthy. Not true, huh?

yeah so I will say with desserts that's you know, a place where I try to give a little leeway. You know, if you take too much sugar out of a dessert, it's no longer really dessert, so it's still going to be a little bit indulgent. But we do always lower the sugar compared to the original version and do our best to make sure it's healthy fats and whole grains wherever possible.

I'm interested in your vegetarian or plant based diet. I've been, I've been eating a plant based diet for about four or five months now, and it's very hard to find diversity and also tasty foods. What're you gonna be teaching in that class?

So we do a couple different things in that class. One of the favorites is our black bean soup and I do think that soups and stews are one of the easiest ways to get a really filling vegetarian meal because you can fill it up with you know whole grains, beans or lentils and you know whatever vegetables you happen to have in the sink and then you just spice them up however you like. Pick up so we do have

black beans soup that's really popular with the corn salsa and baked tortilla chips on top so you have different. You know flavors, temperatures, and textures going on there. We also do some vegetarian enchiladas where the filling is going to be Pinto beans and zucchini. Then we also do. You know I can't remember the last time the other dish in that class, but I we do a lot of vegetarian dishes you know, sprinkled throughout our classes as well. So it's not just the vegetarian class where you learn how to make those vegetarian recipes. We kind of sneak them in wherever possible. And really, the key is learning how to cook vegetables in a tasty way and learning to utilize you know different sources of protein. Once you know how to do that, you can really just mix and match however you need and.

I know the plant based diet with low fat or no fat diet. If you exercise you can also lose a lot of weight quickly, maybe too much weight. Is there a way you know putting your registered dietitian head on that you can create a meal plan where you're eating healthy and you're exercising but you're not losing a lot of weight?

Yeah, I would say something to remember that once you start exercising your calorie needs do go up and I think a lot of people when they're trying to lose weight, they want to start exercising but not really changed the way that they're eating or they'll start exercise and also change the way that they're eating in order to eat fewer calories. And that's when you'll you will see that rapid weight loss, but it might not always be in the healthiest way, so always remember, the more you exercise the higher your protein and calorie needs are going to be, it's really hard for me to just come up with a, you know, a meal plan for some person that I've never met before and don't know their needs. And if you find I would tell anybody if you find that you're struggling with unexpected weight loss or just your weight in general, it's always best to consult with a dietitian or nutrition professional if possible, because they can really customize something for you. Tell you your exact needs. And make sure that you're seeing the results that you need.

Another interesting part of your program, what I understand is the fact you also offer professional classes to medical students to residents to attendings. What's the reason for that and how is that working now?

Yeah, I'm so we get the doctors in the kitchen and you know, teach them how to cook. And really, the biggest reason for that is that in medical school, there's absolutely no requirement for nutrition education. There is a recommended number of hours for them to receive on nutrition education, but not every school is going to reach that. And often times when they're learning about nutrition in their medical curriculum, it's really just the science basics. You know, they will learn that here's 4 calories per gram of carbohydrate, but how does that translate to talking to your patients about nutrition? It really doesn't, and in a perfect world you know everything nutrition related could go straight to a dietitian, but that's not always an option, so we want to make sure that our physicians have some background knowledge in nutrition and can talk to their patients about food, so that when those questions come up, they're really giving realistic advice to their patients.

Anecdotally, is there anything you remember from any of these professional lessons that you've given to the doctors or to medical students that sticks out in your mind?

Yeah, so in some of our classes we do what I call the Taco challenge and so will break the uh participants up into four different groups. Each group will make four different versions of, just like a classic ground beef Taco, but each one is a little bit different, so one is going to be your standard flour tortilla cheese and store bought Taco seasoning and then we start adding beans and vegetables all the way up to a fully vegetarian Taco and one of my favorite things in class is to show the nutrition difference between their like baseline Taco and even just the Taco that has a couple little tweaks to it. You know some more vegetables switching to a corn tortilla. The residents will see you know the steep drop in sodium and amount of calories and they'll see the big increase in fiber just with a couple of changes. And like they're always shocked at the difference in nutrition. And I just love to see their faces when that happens. 'cause they start to realize wow, like you really don't need to make a lot of crazy changes in order to see a really big impact on the nutrition label.

I'm sure that hits home because many of our at least internal medicine residents are from central and South America, who probably grown up on this kind of food and they probably see where they've gone wrong for the their past life and where they can go in the future.\

So how can people find out more about the cooking classes and about your schedule for the fall?

yeah, so people can always visit our website, which is SBH teachingkitchen.org. We have a big ol button on the front of the website that you can click on that says sign up for classes and that will bring you to a site that will list all of our upcoming classes that are available so you can easily sign up for a class online or you can email us at SBH teaching kitchen at sbhny.org. Uh, if you want more information that way, or someone can call me at 718-960-3843. I will happily talk to anybody about the cooking classes and sign them up then and there. You could also just stop by the teaching kitchen and see the kitchen and we'll chat with you and get you signed up for a class in person if you like. So we try to make it as easy as possible to reach us and sign up for our class.

And for \$5 a pop, you really can't go wrong.

No, it's uh, it's honestly so cheap for our class. It's a great deal.

Yeah, well thank you Emily for joining us today and SBH Bronx Health talk. For more information, sure great to have you. For more information on services available at SBH Health System, visit [www.sbhny.org](http://www.sbhny.org). Until next time.