

## Confused about how to eat a healthier diet?

"All-natural." "Free-range." "High fiber." These are just some of the claims food manufacturers make about their products.

But for consumers standing in the grocery store aisle pondering what to buy, food labels can be confusing and hard to understand.

Registered dietician Mary Ellen Grimes gave a presentation at the main branch of the Patchogue-Medford Library on Friday afternoon in which she explained how consumers can decode food labels to make healthy food choices.

"It seems overwhelming, but it's really not that hard," said Grimes, who teaches nutrition science and wellness at Farmingdale State College.

Those smarter food choices can also be delicious, as Grimes showed when she prepared a healthy black bean and quinoa salad that students got to sample. Friday's class was the first of a free, three-part series that Grimes will teach as part of a program offered by Harmony Café and the Patchogue-Medford Library. The classes are funded by a grant Harmony Café received from the Whole Foods Foundation's Whole Cities program.

Harmony Café is a Patchogue-based nonprofit founded by Rosemarie McCarthy with the mission to "build a healthy community by providing wellness education and access to nutritious foods," according to its website.

In addition to offering classes on nutrition and healthy eating, Harmony Café runs, among other things, a free community Thanksgiving Dinner. It is partnering with HIS Coalition for the Homeless to offer a free community dinner on Easter Sunday, April 20, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at New Life Community Church, 380 Lakeland Avenue, in Sayville.

Eighteen people have signed up for the nutrition course.

There's still time to sign up for the other two classes, which will be at the library on Friday, April 18 at 1 p.m. and Friday, April 25 at 1 p.m. Each class runs about 90 minutes to two hours.

The April 18 class will focus on "Sugar, Fat and Salt: What You Need to Know," including how to make your diet more heart healthy. On April 25, Grimes will discuss "Plant-Based Meals," including the differences between plant-based and animal proteins and how to build more plant-based proteins into your diet.

Friday's class attracted people like Karen Reilly, of Patchogue.

Reilly said she thought the class was "phenomenal" and the information helpful. She also said she plans to pay more attention to food labels when she shops. "I'll be turning around the labels and really reading them," she said.

Reilly said she plans to return for the remaining two classes in the program. "I'll definitely be coming back," she said.

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Caryn Sheridan, of Medford, said this is the third class she's taken with Grimes and they've made her "much more knowledgeable" and aware of the foods she buys.

"I look at things more closely," she said. "Mary Ellen always gives phenomenal classes," Sheridan said. "Everything Harmony Café does is great."

Grimes said she wants people who take the class to "be more aware of what's in your food." "Having nutrition knowledge is empowering," she said. n

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