Food expert cuts through the hype

by VIKKI HOPES
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TEACHING CHILDREN about nutrition can go a long way to reducing crime and easing the burden on the medical system, says a health expert visiting Abbotsford next week.

Dr. Antonia Demas, a renowned nutrition expert based in Trumansburg, New York, presents two free workshops next week from her Food is Elementary program. It is the first time she has hosted the sessions in Canada.

Demas is recognized by well known health professionals such as Dean Ornish for her innovative approach to children’s nutrition education.

“I admire the work of Dr. Antonia Demas, who is a pioneer in improving the nutrition of children,” Ornish has said.

Demas has worked with schools in the United States and with troubled youth to change their attitudes about food. Her focus is on a plant-based, nutrient-rich diet no higher than 30 per cent fat.

The results have been phenomenal, she said. In one school where she worked with delinquent youth, a change in diet corresponded with an improvement in behavior.
Dr. Antonia Demas shows the value of healthy eating during her Food is Elementary program. She visits Abbotsford for two sessions next week.

When you eat junk, you behave like junk.

- Dr. Antonia Demas, noted nutrition expert

measures to protect their health, way to really see food and enjoy it.

The challenge is in getting the message across to children whose parents are often too busy to make home-cooked meals and often uninformed about smart nutrition choices themselves. Factor in the easy and plentiful access to junk food, and it can be even more difficult to get kids to listen up.

Dumas did by making food a fun, sensory experience, she said.

One of her favourite activities during her workshops is to give children a white plate and tell them to pretend it’s a canvas.

“Tell them they’re going to create something beautiful on this canvas and at the end they’re going to eat it,” she said. “It’s a

meals that will entice them to try

New foods, such as tofu, couscous and lentils.

Dumas also gives kids the facts about junk food, such as the pop they can find in their school vending machines.

“When kids realize how corrosive sodas are and that they’re empty calories, and when they realize what goes into fast food places...they understand what they’re eating and it becomes less appealing,” she said.

Dumas said children are famous for taking these messages home and sharing their knowledge with their parents.

That’s why schools need to play a more active role in teaching and encouraging good nutrition, she said.

“They’re in an ideal place to teach kids early on about nutrition,” she said.

Dumas has developed a curriculum that is being used by many schools in the U.S. The lessons incorporate geography, culture, mathematics and science.

Dumas said the payoffs are more attentive students, a decrease in behavioral problems and a generation that can take steps towards chronic disease prevention.

“I want them to understand the relationship between diet and disease and that the eating habits they form as children are going to have lifelong effects,” she said.

Dumas’ presentations in Abbotsford take place Wednesday, July 31 and Thursday, Aug. 1 at W. J. Mouat secondary (32235 Mouat Drive). They begin at 7:30 p.m.

Parents, teachers and kids are invited to attend.

The first workshop is on Food-based Education in Home and School and is so Vital Today. The second session, called Food is Elementary in Action, involves children in hands-on food preparation.

The free sessions are sponsored by the Coronary Health Improvement Project (CHIP) and Abbotsford’s new Silver Hills Bakery. A free-will offering will be taken. Registration is not required. For more information, call the CHIP line at 604-837-7102.