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pounds on her first trip to Weight Watchers in 1991.

"I learned I had multiple sclerosis and pictured myself someday lying somewhere unable to care for myself," Keller said. "I prayed a long time for the desire to lose the weight, hoping in the back of my mind that it wouldn't be granted. But it was and a friend asked me to go to a meeting with her."

Now, Keller said, it feels great to know that if she falls down she can pick herself up again.

"We find that most people eat for emotional reasons," Ferris said. "They find food has a numbing effect and are used just like drugs and alcohol."

The therapist said it is important to understand why we eat too

much and consider what is at the root of the bingeing before sitting down with a box of Little Debbie's.

"We tell people that when they get an urge to binge, they should put the craving off for 15 minutes and gradually extend that time. Most of the time, they find the craving passes," said Ferris.

Keller said there is little chance of eliminating desserts and snacks from her life, so she has just learned to accommodate the treat into her daily food plan.

"If I'm going to fix a desert, I plan for it all day and cut back somewhere else," she said.

Noble finds herself snacking during the day, so instead of getting out the whole bag of pretzels and munching during the course

of the day, she measures out a cup of pretzels and puts that on the counter.

"That's all the pretzels I get for the day," she said. "I eat them more slowly and am more conscious of how many I am eating."

Rutkowski, a Plymouth resident and immediate past president of the Michigan Dietetic Association, said these are good ways to curb the amount of food you eat during the day and to better plan meals.

"It's important to make trades sometimes," she said. "You can't eliminate junk food completely. It's just important to consider what we are eating."

Fat is perhaps the most important dietary avoidance there is. We all need a certain amount of fat in our diet, but Rutkowski said Americans eat far more fat than is necessary. Chicken, fish and pasta are all healthy alternatives to the high-fat, red meat diet most of us grew up with.

Rutkowski said it is also important to consider calorie density when selecting fruits and vegetables. Fruits with lower calorie density have a greater amount of water — a banana has greater density than watermelon. The banana is still good for you, but you may want to limit the amount of bananas you eat to promote weight loss.

Here are some other tips Rut-

kowski offers on weight loss and just healthy eating in general:

■ Consider the size of the plate used. A luncheon plate will look full with less food on it.

■ Sit down and slow down to eat. By eating slowly, the body has more time to digest the food and know that it is full. Try putting utensils down between bites of food and don't watch television while eating.

■ Avoid convenience foods. They are fatty, salty and expensive.

■ Bake rather than fry.

■ Try sautés and chutneys in place of sour cream, butter or creamy dips.

■ Make a menu for the week with everything included and make a grocery list using that menu. Buy only as much as is needed for the meal and buy only what is on the list.

■ Plan meals with the meat or protein source as the side dish and the vegetable as the main course. This creates a wonderful opportunity to try new side dish recipes.

■ Take some time before going back for second helpings or start with small portions, leaving yourself the option of going back for another small serving.

■ Exercise is an important part of all diet plans and is an important part of a healthy lifestyle.

Apple bars, pasta won't tip the scale

See related story on losing weight on Taste front.

FRESH APPLE-CEREAL BARS

1 1/4 cups packed brown sugar
1/2 cup shortening
1/4 cup milk
1 egg
2 cups Whole Grain Total or Total Raisin Bran cereal, crushed
1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1 1/2 cups chopped apples (about 2 medium)
1/2 cup raisins

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease a rectangular pan, 13 by 9 by 2-inches. Mix brown sugar, shortening, milk and eggs in large bowl. Stir in cereal, flour, baking soda and cinnamon; mix in apples and raisins.

Spread evenly in pan. Bake 25 to 30 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean; cool completely. Cut into 2 by 1 1/2-inch bars. Makes 36 bars.

Recipe from Karen Wilder, registered dietitian and staff nutritionist for Total Cereal.

PASTA WITH LENTIL SAUCE

1/2 cup chopped onion
1/2 cup chopped carrot
1/2 cup chopped celery
2 cups stewed tomatoes, including liquid
1 cup tomato sauce
1/2 cup drained canned sliced mushrooms
3 ounces dried lentils, rinsed and drained (about 6 tablespoons)
1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
1/2 teaspoon dried basil
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
4 cups hot cooked pasta

Spray large saucepan with non-stick cooking spray. Add onion, carrot and celery; cook over medium-high heat until onion is translucent, about 3 minutes.

Add 1 1/2 cups water and remaining ingredients, except pasta. Bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat, cover partially and simmer until lentils are tender, stirring occasionally, about 1 hour.

Place pasta in large serving bowl. Pour lentil sauce over top and toss to combine. Makes 4 servings.

Snack on sandwich, bacon tomato pie

See related Taste Buds column on Taste front. Here are some Janes family favorites.

BACON TOMATO PIE

1 (8 count) can refrigerated crescent rolls
2 tablespoons Mucky Duck mustard
14 slices crisp bacon, crumbled
2 tomatoes, sliced
6 slices Muenster cheese
3 eggs, separated
3/4 cup sour cream
1/2 cup flour
1 teaspoon Italian spices
Salt, pepper and paprika to taste
6 individual disposable pot pie containers

Unroll the dough and press over bottom and sides of individual pot pie containers. Spread dough with Mucky Duck mustard. Sprinkle with bacon; layer with tomato slices and cheese slices.

Beat egg yolks with sour cream, flour, herbs and spices. Set aside. Beat egg whites until soft peaks form. Fold egg whites into egg yolk mixture gently. Spoon into prepared pot pie containers. Bake at 350 degrees for 25-30 minutes. Makes 6.

Recipe from "The Mucky Duck Mustard Cookbook" by Michele Marshall. (Copyright 1991, \$14.95). To order cookbook, call 1-800-733-DUCK.

Chef's secret: Vegetarians can omit the bacon and substitute steamed broccoli, sautéed mushrooms, corn and sautéed onions for a great taste too!

Even though it didn't finish in the top five, this recipe was a national finalist at the Beef Cook-off in Cheyenne, Wyo., this fall.

ITALIAN BISTRO STEAK SUBS

1 1/2 pound boneless beef top sirloin, cut 1-inch thick
6 hogie or crusty Italian rolls (split lengthwise)
12 romaine lettuce leaves
1/2 teaspoon garlic salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1/2 cups shredded fontinella or mozzarella cheese
Pepper relish
1 jar (9 1/2 ounces) mixed pepper salad
1/2 cup prepared chunky mild salsa
1/4 cup sliced ripe olives

Drain pepper salad, reserving 2 teaspoons of the oil mixture. Coarsely chop pepper salad. In a small bowl, combine chopped pepper salad, salsa and olives; set aside.

Brush reserved oil mixture over both sides of beef steaks. Place steak on a hot grill (or under a broiler) and cook for 16-20 minutes for rare to medium doneness, turning once.

Trim fat from steak. Carve steak crosswise into thin slices; season with garlic salt and pepper. Line bottom half of each roll with romaine lettuce leaves. Arrange steak slices over the top. Top each sandwich with 2 tablespoons pepper relish; sprinkle with shredded cheese. Close sandwiches. Serves 6.

Recipe from Joyce Lee Sprout, Bath Maine, finalist in the 1993 National Beef Cookoff.

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as possible into October, they'll last another month on the kitchen counter and extend homegrown tomato delights long after vine-ripened tomatoes are unavailable in the produce section."

Horwath is interested in ordering from seed companies specializing in heirloom varieties. "This year, I'm ordering Radiator Charley's Mortgage Lifter tomatoes for the first time. I understand they are especially flavorful in addition to having an intriguing name."

Horwath's garden also includes herbs. "I buy basil plants from a garden supply/nursery house," he said. "Once started from plants, the perennials such as thyme, oregano, rosemary, sage and mint come up every year. Mint is an underused and undervalued herb. Mediterranean cooking, which is popular today, has discovered the use of mint."

Much creative gardening is being done by several California wineries. The most innovative is at Petzer Vineyards Valley Oaks Ranch in Hopland, California. Always on the cutting edge of food trends, the Petzer garden abounds with an infinite variety of vegetables, especially peppers. Southwest cooking is hot!

Petzer's gardening coordinator Jeff Dawson starts peppers in a greenhouse with heat underneath the trays. "After the frost-free date in your area, harden seedlings for a week or two by setting them out for a few hours on warm days," Dawson advises. "Don't plant seedlings too early. They will react negatively if the ground or night air is cold and they may never recover. Pepper plants need staking if you live in an area subject to gusty summer thunderstorms."

Dawson's remark about transplanting too early holds for all seedlings. They all need warm

soil and warm air. A cold spell can set them back all season. The recommended planting period in Wayne and Oakland counties is May 20 to June 1. Plants can go into the ground earlier than May 20, but then the gardener must monitor weather forecasts and cover tender plants with cut-off milk cartons to protect them. Frost-free dates are statistical and only provide guidelines.

Dawson agrees with Horwath that a garden offers ornamental attraction. "Peppers perform well in containers and enhance the attractiveness of a patio or terrace," he says. "In cooler climates, containers make good sense. You can move them into the sun during the day and keep them sheltered at night."

Herbs grow equally well in containers and in the ground. Using planters in a variety of colors provides instant outdoor beauty. When using a planter, drill drainage holes in the pot bottom and for enhanced drainage, fill the bottom with pebbles.

Most modern seed companies concentrate on hybrid varieties that are bred for uniform size, high yield, disease resistance and shipability with little flavor consideration. If you haven't been able to grow tasty tomatoes like the ones your grandpa used to grow, you need to research heirloom seeds. These are the beloved, old varieties passed from gardener to gardener over the backyard fence for many generations.

Flavor is foremost with heirlooms. Horwath is enchanted by the very name of Radiator Charley's Mortgage Lifter tomatoes.

To leave a message on the Herald's voice mail — dial 953-2047, mailbox 1864.

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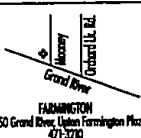
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