

How can I adopt healthier food habits?

People like to believe they eat healthy foods, but few succeed at doing it consistently. Here are some tips you can use if you are trying to incorporate balance and good nutrition into your diet.

- **Make a shopping list and stick to it.** When making the list, plan out your meals in advance so you know what to buy. At the store, resist the temptation to purchase items not on the list.
- **Never shop while hungry.** This can lead to all impulse purchases which waste money and can sabotage a healthy eating plan.
- **Do not turn to food in times of stress or sadness.** Many of us use food as a coping mechanism during difficult times. Learn to recognize how you can use food to cope and work to replace food with healthier methods.
- **Assess your eating patterns.** Eating simply because you are bored or while you are watching television can be detrimental to your diet. Try to eat only at designated times or only in certain areas. If this does not work for you, try portioning out healthy snacks that you can eat in front of the television.
- **Plan meals in advance.** Determining your meal plan at the beginning of each week can help you ensure that you are getting a variety of nutrients every day. Ensure that your daily food intake includes whole-grain products, fruits, vegetables, dairy products and protein-rich foods.
- **Use your freezer.** If you find that you do not have time during the week to prepare healthy meals, consider making double batches of your favorites on the weekends and freezing individual portions.
- **Eat breakfast every day.** A healthy breakfast will provide you with energy to start your day. Eating breakfast can also help reduce food cravings and overeating during the day.
- **Keep a food diary.** By recording everything that you eat and drink, you can discover ways to reduce calories and fat. You can also use this diary as a guide when planning meals and making your grocery list.
- **Eat smaller portions.** When dining out, ask for a take-home container and place half of your meal inside before you even begin eating. Having less food on your plate will help you avoid overeating, and you will have a nutritious meal prepared for the next day.
- **Try different cooking methods.** Try grilling or broiling meats instead of frying them. For fish, try poaching it in broth. Experiment with adding various types of vegetables to side dishes.

- **Learn to substitute.** Many ingredients can be replaced to create healthier versions of old classics. For example, try using plain yogurt instead of sour cream, or skim milk instead of whole milk. You can also try using broth instead of butter when sautéing vegetables or making mashed potatoes.
- **Choose healthy snacks.** Fruit, yogurt, vegetables and unsalted popcorn are nutritious alternatives to potato chips, candy or other snacks.
- **Drink more water.** Too much coffee and soda can lead to dehydration, while many fruit juices are high in sugar and calories. Drinking water can also help to curb food cravings since it will give you the feeling of being full.
- **Everything in moderation.** Do not deprive yourself of your favorite foods. Even fast-food items can have a place in a healthy diet, as long as they are eaten in moderation.
- **Make changes gradually.** Eating habits are hard to change, so do not expect to change all of your habits overnight. Pick one habit a week to focus on changing. Once you have made a permanent change, move onto the next habit.
- **Make sure to reward yourself.** Sticking to a healthy eating plan is hard work, so be sure to indulge yourself occasionally with a small piece of dessert or other reward.

Resources

- National Institutes of Health (NIH): <http://nih.gov>
- United States Department of Agriculture Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion: www.nutrition.gov
- United States Food and Drug Administration: www.fda.gov

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