

Ten Tips for Healthy Living in the New Year

The experts make it sound so easy: All you have to do to feel your best, maintain a healthy weight and fight off chronic disease is eat more fruits, vegetables and whole grains; cut back on your sugar, salt and saturated fat consumption; and control your calories. Sounds simple, but with everyday life, busy schedules, and fast food on every corner, eating healthy can seem next to impossible. To help you change a less-than-perfect diet to one that helps you look and feel your best, start with these ten basic tips.

Plan. Plan. Plan. Eating well doesn't just happen, but it doesn't need to become a full-time job, either. Make a conscious decision to plan and go grocery shopping once per week. Taking time to plan and shop for a week's worth of meals saves time in the long run by minimizing the time wasted trying to decide what to fix and multiple trips to the store or fast food restaurant.

Cook. It may sound like a dirty word, since it takes a little time and planning, but when you cook you have control – over the portion size, as well as the fat and salt content of the dish. And if you've taken the time to plan ahead and shop for your meals, getting dinner on the table can be quicker than you'd think.

Rethink your drink. Scientific studies have concluded that Americans have sipped their way to weight gain by drinking an increasing amount of soda and other sugary drinks over the past four decades. An extra can of soda per day can add up to 15 pounds in a single year. Substituting water for one 12 oz soda saves 150 (*sugar*) calories.

Eat breakfast. A healthy breakfast can hold off those mid-morning hunger pangs, keeping you away from high-fat, high-calorie vending machine or fast food choices. Studies show breakfast eaters are significantly less likely to be obese than non-breakfast eaters.

Plan around the produce. Start your meal planning with the fruit or veggie you would like to have instead of the meat or starch; you'll be more likely to get a good serving of produce. You can still have the meat, but thinking about the fruits and veggies first and building your meal around them means they won't be forgotten.

Make meals minus the meat (*at least occasionally*). Dried beans of all types (*such as pintos, black beans, and lentils*) may not be glamorous, but they are nutritional powerhouses loaded with protein, fiber and iron and they're easy on the calories. Cook your own to avoid the added salt in canned beans.

Remember the rainbow. Eating many different colors of fruits and veggies increases variety and decreases boredom, making you more likely to increase your produce intake. Studies have shown that plant foods improve health by reducing the risk of some cancers, slowing signs of aging, helping to improve memory, promoting heart health, and enhancing the immune system. How many colors have you had today?

Alter your restaurant mindset. The typical American eats half their meals outside the home. A restaurant meal is no longer a special occasion, so we don't have the luxury of ignoring fat or calorie content. Enjoy your meal (*and the fact that you didn't have to cook it or do the dishes*), but choose as many vegetables as you can and watch those portion sizes. Don't be afraid to ask for your to-go box up front; put half your meal in the box right away and save it for tomorrow's lunch. You just saved money AND calories.



Enjoy eating. Healthy eating is just that, eating. Forget about what you think you can't have and focus instead on enjoying what you can and should have more of – fruits, veggies, low-fat dairy products and whole grains.

Above all, go gradually. Whatever changes you decide to make, don't try to make them all at once. Small changes made gradually and consistently will add up to long-term positive health changes over time. Choose one or two of these ideas and try them for a month, then think about moving forward by adding another one. Try all of them over the course of the year and you'll find yourself looking and feeling better. And if that's not motivation to change, just remember, swimsuit season is only 17 weeks away...

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