Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Diet is a Four-Letter Word: Healthy Eating for Life



If you're thinking about trying the latest new diet, you might want to think again. Though short-term diets often promise lasting change, they usually deliver a program too difficult to maintain. For most people a “quick fix” diet usually results in disappointment, with whatever weight was lost regained, if not added to.

The tips below can help shift your focus from unrealistic, sometimes even unhealthy, quick fixes to a long-term strategy that you can live with and enjoy.

Be realistic. Rather than a total overhaul of your diet, make small changes to your diet and activity level over time until your new, healthy eating plan is a habit. For example, start by including fruit with your breakfast, bringing a healthy afternoon snack to work, or drinking a glass of water instead of a coffee. Focus on health—not weight—for long-term success.

As you improve your health, feel good about yourself. Healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes.

Be adventurous. Expand your tastes to enjoy a variety of foods. Try a new fruit or vegetable every week or month. How about a mango, some bok choy, or digging in to a new grain like bulgur, millet or quinoa? Or try eating a familiar food prepared in a different way: chicken in a stir-fry, beef stew simmered in a slow cooker, a vegetable frittata, for example.

Be flexible. Learn how to balance choices. All foods can fit into a healthy eating plan. One food or one meal will not make or break your health, or your waistline. Overall, try to trade off higher fat foods with lower fat choices.

Eat often during the day, when you are active. Stash healthy snacks in your glove box, desk or locker for when you might need a little something.

Some healthy ideas include:

- Dried fruit such as raisins, dates, apricots or berries
- Crackers with cheese or peanut butter
- Energy or granola bars (be sure to read labels—many are as high in sugar as a candy bar)
- Vegetable juices
- Portioned cereal boxes
- Soy nuts

Fruit, a small sandwich, yogurt or a low-fat muffin are other great options if you have a cooler or fridge to keep them in.

For optimal health, balance carbohydrates such as whole grains, cereals, pasta, rice and fruit with proteins such as lean meat, fish, poultry, eggs, cheese, nuts, seeds, soybeans and legumes at each meal. By combining food in this way, your body is able to better digest your meal, and turn the food into usable energy.

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Eat fresh. To help increase your intake of fruits and vegetables, go for ones you know and like first. Most of the food guides to healthy eating recommend consuming five to 10 servings of fruits or vegetables per day. A vegetable or fruit serving is approximately 125 milliliters (half a cup) or one medium-sized piece of fruit.

Plan your healthy eating strategy around fruits and vegetables. For example:

- Breakfast: one to two servings of fruit
- Lunch: one serving of fruit, one serving of vegetables
- Dinner: two servings of vegetables
- Snack: one serving of fruit

Be active. Get moving! Forget the "no pain, no gain" mentality and think fun. Seek out a friend or family member to join you in regular walks, bike rides or in-line skating. Build up to 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days.

Be sensible. Enjoy all foods, just don't overdo it.

Even little indulgences can be part of a healthy diet in sensible amounts. If eating desserts, go for a single scoop of ice cream rather than a double, split that large piece of cheesecake with a friend, or put a few sweets on a plate rather than straight out of the package to avoid overdoing it.

While following the suggestions above, you can sneak in a little more healthy eating with these time-saving tips:

- Purchase ready-to-serve greens and add additional vegetables/fruits to your salad.
- Purchase pre-cut fresh veggies and baby carrots to eat raw or use in a stir-fry.
- Whip up a smoothie using low-fat yogurt and frozen berries.
- Add extra vegetables on a pizza or wrap.

Try some small changes toward an active lifestyle. For instance, try parking further from the mall entrance, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, going for a brisk walk at lunch, shovelling the driveway or walking the dog.

Your doctor, nutritionist or reputable local health club can help you make a plan that suits your lifestyle and health goals. For a healthier body, weight and attitude, go for long-term solutions instead of short-term resolutions.