How to develop healthy eating habits

Proper nutrition can help you maintain a healthy weight, improve overall wellness, and avoid chronic illnesses like heart disease and diabetes.

Obesity means that you carry too much body fat. According to the US Preventative Services Task Force, being overweight or obese can lead to several health complications. It can take a toll on your body and it puts you at risk for chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and even some cancers.

A common assessment of your obesity risk is the Body Mass Index (BMI). BMI measures your body fat based on your height and weight.

The basic principle of weight loss is that you need to burn more calories than you consume in a day. Rethinking and improving your food choices is a good place to start. But don't worry—eating fewer calories doesn't mean you have to be hungry! Below are some simple guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to ensure you eat healthy, delicious food that will keep you satisfied.

Eat lots of fruits and veggies.

Fruits and vegetables are generally low in calories but packed with vitamins and minerals. They're also full of fiber and water, which means they'll help you feel full for a long time. Check out the U.S. Department of Agriculture's MyPlate tool to see your recommended daily serving for fruits and vegetables. You can also use their interactive meal planner here.

Hydrate!

Staying hydrated can help you maintain energy and lose weight. Sometimes it's hard to tell the difference between hunger and thirst. Drinking more water helps your body stay hydrated so you know when you're truly hungry.

How much water should you drink? Experts say that we shouldn't go by the old recommendation of eight glasses per day. How much water you need depends upon many factors, including your height, weight, activity level and even where you live. A general guideline is to drink ½ an ounce to an ounce of water for every pound you weigh.

Avoid the hidden calories in sugary drinks.

Sodas, juices and sweet teas can add a lot of calories and sugar to your diet. Instead of reaching for a soda or juice with your meal, grab a seltzer or plain water instead.

Pick whole grains over refined carbs.

Whole grains provide dietary fiber, vitamins and minerals. The fiber in whole grains also helps you feel full for a long time while consuming fewer calories. Whole grains like brown rice, barley, oats and rye offer more nutrients and fiber than heavily processed grains like white rice and most bagels, muffins and white bread.

Know the difference between bad fats and good fats.

Your body needs fat to function. However, it's important to eat the right kinds of fat. Here's the breakdown:

- **The good:** Unsaturated fats like those found in olive oil, avocado and nuts satiate hunger and are very beneficial to certain organs like your heart, skin and eyes.
- **The in-between:** Eat saturated fats sparingly. These fats are found in butter, red meat and cheese. They can clog arteries which may lead to major health problems like stroke, heart attack and high blood pressure.
- **The bad:** Avoid trans fats. They're found in heavily-processed foods and can clog arteries and even lead to certain cancers.

Consume salt in moderation.

Salt (sodium on a nutrition label), is essential for the body. But too much can raise your blood pressure, putting you at risk for heart problems. Sodium is found in most processed and packaged foods. Cutting back on packaged foods can help to reduce your sodium intake.

Manage your portions.

Watching your portion sizes will allow you to eat the foods you love while staying healthy. There are several ways to avoid overeating:

- Test the size of your plates and bowls. Try pouring your normal morning cereal portion and juice into measuring cups to see how much you're eating.
- Next time you buy plates, don't choose the biggest ones. People generally fill their plate, regardless of its size.
- Next time you're at a restaurant, ask the server to box half of your meal when you order.
- Pay attention to feelings of hunger and try to stop eating once you feel satisfied.

Adjust your lifestyle to encourage healthy eating.

If these suggestions seem overwhelming, don't worry–it can get easier over time! We recommend starting out by trying some of these tips. See how you feel after a while. The important thing is to make sustainable progress.

A food log is your friend.

One proven way to lose weight and to keep it off is to maintain a food log. It makes you more aware of what you're eating and can help highlight patterns. Keeping a food log can also help doctors and nutritionists offer suggestions. You can record a log on a website, in an app or simply with pen and paper.