

HEALTHY EATING AND WIEGHT MANAGEMENT by Blanche Keir, BA, DTR

Healthy eating and maintaining a healthy weight is not about strict nutrition control, staying unrealistically thin or depriving yourself of the food you love. Rather it's about feeling good, having more energy, and keeping yourself as healthy as possible - all of which can be achieved by learning some nutrition basics and using them in a way that works for you. You don't need to "diet" to eat healthy; you need to pursue a healthy lifestyle.

Many people go on diets and are not successful in either losing weight or keeping it off. This becomes frustrating for the individual and they become discouraged. The key to successful weight management is to find a plan that works with your body's individual needs so that you can avoid common diet pitfalls and instead, make lifestyle changes that can help you achieve long term healthy weight loss success.

When starting a weight loss program it's always a good idea to talk to a nutritional professional. Many weightloss programs, especially fad diets or quick fix plans, set you up for failure. They isolate you from the real world making you feel deprived and left out because you're restricted from certain types of food (fat, carbohydrates, sugar). You may lose weight on these diets initially, but can't keep it off. Diets that severely cut calories, restrict food or rely on purchased meals can work in the short term but once you've reached your weight loss goal you've learned nothing about how to sustain a lifelong, healthy eating pattern and eventually the pounds start to pile up again. This is not a practical or healthy approach to weight loss. Eliminating entire food groups creates nutrient imbalances in the body and can wreak havoc with our emotional well being.

Losing weight is not easy or fast, especially if you consider that one pound of fat equals 3500 calories. Your weight is a balancing act between how many calories you consume and how many calories you burn. To lose one pound per week, you need to consume 500 less calories per day and/or burn 500 more calories per day. Putting it in those terms sounds like a monumental task. Rather think in terms of eliminating only 100 calories a day from your diet and in one year, you could lose 10 pounds. Eliminating 100 calories should be easy to do since a can of soda is about 150 calories, a Starbucks grande café late is 190 calories and a 3 oz bag of corn chips is 441 calories.

The best way to lose weight and keep it off is to start slow and make changes to your eating habits over time. Don't focus on eating less food; instead focus on consuming fewer calories by making smarter calorie choices. Any change to improve your diet and lifestyle is a positive change. Here are some tips to help in this process.

- Choose "low density foods" which means foods that allow you to eat a larger portion but are lower in calories. Foods like fruits and vegetables contain more water and fiber and fill you up quicker.
- Switch your carbohydrates from "simple" to "complex". Eat fewer refined carbohydrates and eat more whole grains such as brown rice, whole wheat breads and pasta, barley, quinoa, oats. These foods have a higher fiber content that helps to keep you fuller longer and provide you with more sustainable energy.
- Vary your protein. Protein keeps you full longer than carbohydrates but most of us consume more than our bodies really need. Instead of red meat or poultry, try some fish twice a week and meals that incorporate beans or nuts. This will help lower your saturated fat intake while adding healthful nutrients, fiber and antioxidant rich flavonols.
- Eat more good fat. Minimize your intake of saturated fats and replace them with polyunsaturated fats or monounsaturated fats. Fat in itself isn't bad rather the type of fat and the quantity of fat is harmful. Try to keep fat to no more than 25% to 30% of your total daily calories. *Unless you have been instructed to increase your fat intake due to menstrual problems*

- Drink more water. If you replace soda, coffee or alcohol with water, think of the calories you can eliminate. Also, being thirsty can sometimes be confused with hunger so by drinking water, you may avoid consuming extra calories. Plus it will help you metabolize food more easily.
- Always eat breakfast and try eating smaller meals throughout the day. Research has shown that people who eat breakfast weigh less. A healthy breakfast can jumpstart your metabolism and keep you fuller longer and eating small healthy meals throughout the day (rather than three standard meals) keeps your energy up and your metabolism going.
- Control your portions. We live in a supersized nation and have begun to think that mega portions of food are the norm. In reality normal portions are not very big. Visual cues can help us gauge the proper amount of food. A serving of meat, chicken or fish is about the size of a deck of cards. A slice of bread is the size of a CD case. A pancake is the size of a CD. Salad dressing or oil should be equivalent to the size of a matchbook. A serving of pasta or rice is about the size of a baseball. When portioning out your food, divide your plate in half. One half should be filled with vegetables and fruit and the other half should contain a small portion of protein and a starch. Load up on the fruit and vegetables.
- Make exercise part of your life. It doesn't matter what you do just do something. Find an activity that you enjoy and do it on a regular basis. Start slowly and gradually increase your level of intensity and the number of days you exercise. A healthy adult should strive for at least thirty minute of daily exercise. Research shows that three 10 minute spurts of exercise per day are just as good as one 30 minute workout.
- Watch less television. We actually burn less calories watching television than sleeping. If you need to watch TV, do some exercise while doing it – use hand weights or resistance bands, workout with a medicine ball or do some sit ups or squats.