



## Your Healthy Eating Plan

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As anyone who has ever tried to change his or her eating habits knows, old habits die hard. During moments of challenge—big or small, perceived or real—we can easily fall back into our comfortable old ways. In order to create new, lasting patterns that nourish and revitalize us, we need a warm and friendly environment, not a harsh and scolding one. We need to be kind to (and patient with) ourselves as we examine our relationship with food and make the changes we need in order to be healthy. Here are some tips to help you make your relationship with food a little better:

**1. Set an intention.** Decide how you'd like to be three months, six months, and maybe even a year from now. Remember, intentions are different than goals. We set goals with our brains—and if we don't achieve those goals by a predetermined time, we feel we've failed. We set intentions with our hearts—they represent our hopes and desires. They allow us to visualize and move toward something one step at a time. Write your intentions down; draw them; revisit them.

**2. Engage ALL your senses.** Be completely honest about how the foods you eat make you feel. Pay close attention to what you choose and why you choose it. Notice the aroma of the food, its texture and appearance. How does it make you feel as you're eating it, after you eat it, and even the next day? If having two donuts every afternoon makes you feel amazing in every way, then go for it! You're obviously the exception. If, on the other hand, selecting whole foods—fresh fruits and veggies and whole grains—makes you feel better, evens out your mood and energy levels, notice that. Be aware and honest about the results you feel physically, mentally, and emotionally.

**3. Be friendly, curious, and respectful.** If you feel better when you eat well, why don't you do it more often? Chances are you simply get stuck on certain foods because they temporarily make you feel better—less sad, bored, or agitated. Food becomes a way of regulating emotions. To counter this food for self-soothing habit, begin by simply noticing your “needs.” If you must have that pizza or those cupcakes, stop a moment and be curious. Have an “isn't that interesting” moment. Ask yourself, “What is this urgency really about? What do I really need right now?” Perhaps you need to take a break and have a hot cup of tea; go for a walk; or connect with a friend.

**4. Eat simply and colorfully.** Don't obsess over calories or portion size. Take some pleasure in choosing colorful foods you already know you like that are fresh and in season. And remember, you don't need complicated recipes to make healthy, delicious meals. Eat as simply as possible so you can taste the gifts these foods have to

offer you. Stay away from anything processed, chemical-laden, or anything advertised as fat-free, sugar-free alternatives.

### **5. Don't bite off more than you can chew.**

In other words, don't make sweeping changes, throwing out all the "bad" foods in your pantry and declaring that you will never indulge in anything unhealthy, ever again. That's a recipe for failure. Instead take baby steps. Switch from butter to ghee or olive oil when you cook. Try out a new vegetable and steam it lightly or eat it raw instead of sautéing, frying, or covering it in unhealthy sauces. Once you've had a little success, you'll find you can add more healthy choices more easily.

**6. Applaud your successes; forgive your lapses.** We all know that eating a healthy diet will give us more energy, stabilize our moods, and help us focus more. It will also help us ward off chronic diseases. So yes, moving toward a whole-foods-based plan makes a lot of sense. But don't beat yourself up every time you fall off the health wagon. Remember, every healthy food choice you make counts. Those occasional not-so-healthy choices remind us we're human. Simply acknowledge and start again.

**7. Minimize temptation.** Ever notice foods you shouldn't have become tantalizingly appealing as soon as you deem them "off limits"? If so, start slow. If you love sweet or salty, fat-laden snacks, reduce the frequency you indulge and the portion size. Take a few, close up the bag and put the rest away. Relegate these foods to the only-on-occasion list.

**8. Practice mindful eating.** Once a day, eat a meal and forego anything else. Turn off the TV, remove your computer from the table, and don't talk on the phone. With loving attention, put the food on your plate and pause for a moment while you enjoy the look and aroma of the food. Every time you take a bite, put down your fork, chew your food slowly, savoring every bite. As an experiment, see if you can chew a piece of fruit 100 times before you swallow. Notice how that changes your experience.

**9. Do more yoga.** The more you practice yoga or take time to meditate, the more you can hear and feel what your body needs. You may discover, for example, that the fast food you eat on the run doesn't make your body feel so good later on. Or the five cups of coffee you had that morning make staying still almost impossible. You may also notice when you do eat something healthy, you feel calmer and happier and your digestive track is grateful. Deep breathing exercises will calm your nervous system and help you stay present to any sensations in your body.

**10. Cook at home and invite your friends.** Learning to cook, if you don't know already, is the easiest way to personalize a healthy eating plan. Plenty of healthy-foods cookbooks are out there; some cover the basics nicely while others help us get more creative. Hit the farmers market in your area and bring a friend or two along with you. Preparing foods and infusing them with love and attention is one of the best gifts you can offer. If your cooking skills aren't ready for prime time, go potluck. Cook one or two healthy things and invite a few friends to do the same. Good food + great conversation + plenty of laughter = recipe for healthy action.

## Staff Article

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Successfully switching to a healthy diet takes practice, curiosity, honesty, and forgiveness. Making healthy choices isn't about pleasing your doctor or your partner, or about societal shoulds and shouldn'ts. It's about aligning your actions with what you know to be true for your body and your mind. Ultimately treating yourself to a heaping helping of loving kindness will keep your body strong, your mind clear, and your spirit forever young.



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