

10 Simple Secrets for Building Healthy Eating Habits that Last

Eating a salad, opting to cook at home or taking a pass on the donuts in the conference room; for the most part, no one has trouble doing these things occasionally. It's consistently keeping them a part of our regular eating habits that poses the biggest challenge.

But if you want to make progress, whether your goal is to improve your overall health, cut back on your sugar intake or even lose weight, consistent healthy eating is absolutely key. Of course, building new habits that will actually last isn't an easy thing to do. It takes time, patience, focus and a strategic approach.

What exactly does that strategic approach involve? The following 10 tips from Alexandra Miller, R.D.N., L.D.N, corporate dietitian at Medifast, Inc. explain how to slowly revamp your eating habits and develop new, healthier behaviors that will stick with you in the long run.

Keep a food and exercise journal

Keeping a simple log of your diet and exercise habits will help you keep yourself accountable and can also help you pinpoint any weak spots you might have in each. "Research suggests that people who keep track of their food intake and exercise tend to have better success with managing their weight," Miller said.

Avoid temptation

A recent study from researchers at Cornell found that when it comes to making eating healthy easy, one of the most effective approaches involves stocking up on healthy foods so you'll perceive them as convenient, attractive and an obvious choice. "Out of sight, out of mind — don't keep foods that will undoubtedly tempt you in the house," Miller said. "Instead, stock up on fresh fruits and vegetables, Greek yogurt, pre-portioned bags of nuts and other healthy foods."

Find support

"A friend, spouse, healthcare provider or community support group can help keep you accountable and motivated," Miller explained. See also: [The Fitness Benefits of Working Out with a Friend](#).

Know your why

Miller said it's important to identify a distinct reason for your goal. Think about how it will change your life now and in the future. Think about what you want to accomplish in life and how eating healthier will help you achieve that. "Take time to reflect on why you are making these changes now," she said.

Find an exercise routine you enjoy

Staying active is not only an important part of staying healthy, but it can also help keep you inspired and motivated to fuel your body with quality foods. But, if you want to keep up with an exercise routine, it's important that you engage in activities that you actually enjoy. "If you don't like running, don't run," Miller said. "Get creative, try new things, and find something that you enjoy. Perhaps cross country skiing in the winter, swimming in the summer, long hikes in the fall and salsa classes in the spring. Whatever it is, schedule time to regularly engage in the activity."

Make sleep a priority

"When you're sleep deprived the body secretes more ghrelin, a hormone that increases appetite, and less leptin, a hormone that signals you to stop eating when you're full," Miller explained. "Getting quality sleep can also help prevent food cravings too. Sleep loss can result in a deficit of the feel-good hormones dopamine and serotonin, causing an increased hunger for foods high in sugar and calories."

Nourish your body

Miller said that eating small, frequent meals throughout the day will help keep you full and focused. "Don't skip meals," she said. "Rather, eat meals rich in fiber and protein for satiety as well as vitamins and minerals for nourishment."

Stay hydrated

Making sure to drink enough water will not only keep your entire body running optimally, but it can help stave off false hunger cues, too. "Nothing re-hydrates the cells in your body better than water," Miller said. "Aim for 64 ounces of plain water each day."

Start small

Embrace one new healthy eating habit at a time. People who try to overhaul their entire diet in one day typically feel deprived, overwhelmed and ultimately, frustrated, which leads them to give up and resort to old habits. Instead, aim to slowly integrate new dietary habits into your daily routine, like eating three servings of veggies or drinking eight glasses of water daily.

Take breaks

Don't expect your eating habits to be perfect. Stick to your healthy habits, but also allow for a little bit of leeway. Contemporary tools like health and fitness trackers make us feel compelled to constantly be working on improving our bodies and healthy habits 24/7, but this can become overwhelming and even lead to wellness fatigue. For this reason, it's important to disengage from tracking and logging every once in a while. Taking a week off here and there where you won't have to stress about calories or logging every meal won't set you back or "undo" your progress but it will offer a much needed mental and physical relief.