

Goodbye Bad Eating Habits

by Blythe Thimsen

8 WAYS TO EAT HEALTHY IN 2011



IT'S ALMOST A CLICHÉ, BUT the New Year often comes with a vow to eat better, be healthy and get in shape. Easier said than done. Overcoming poor eating habits can be a daunting task, and one that leaves many of us with our wheels turning, not sure how to make the changes necessary for a healthier lifestyle. Many people "don't want to make these changes, but are in a place where they can't ignore it anymore," says Laurie Payne, a certified diabetes educator at CHER (Community Health Education & Resources) located in downtown Spokane.

Rather than trying to start with a detailed program, Payne suggests looking at some basic details of your life, and assessing what works best for you. "Start with how you eat, rather than what you eat," she says. "This opens the door to individualization. When you break down the how, you get the what you eat, how often you eat, are you eating the major food groups, are you eating some whole grains?"

Eating "superfoods" is a trend that has been in the spotlight quite a bit lately, with the premise being that there are certain foods that fill you up quickly, offer a variety of disease-fighting nutrients, and can be easily incorporated into your daily meals without adding additional calories. Payne says clients often come to her and ask for a list of these foods, so they can bypass the process of figuring out how to tailor a nutrition system to them. "If you follow that line of thinking, the first thing you run into is 'I don't like that,' 'it's too expensive,' 'no one in my house will eat that,'" she says.

"The number one reason people eat a food is the taste. People don't go back to it if they don't like it," says Payne. Regardless

if a superfood has all the qualities that can bring you great health, if you don't like it, it doesn't matter if it is on the top of any list, you aren't going to eat it.

So with the magic list of superfoods out the window, the best option is to take a look at your lifestyle and your eating habits in order to know what changes to make and what habits to bring into your life. "I refrain from making too many rules," says Payne, "because these become barriers that derail us. I do have a few main items to stick to, and then you can individualize your plan." Here are some of Payne's top tips for healthy eating:

1. Eat Breakfast. One thing that leads to insulin resistance, which leads to pre-diabetes and diabetes, is a long fast due to not eating. "If you do that repeatedly, that is a stand-alone risk factor for developing diabetes," says Payne. By requiring the liver to supply the body with glucose without the assistance of food, the surrounding cells begin to become insulin-resistant. Our bodies are hard-wired to survive through periods of starvation, but are not meant to incorporate that as a lifestyle. "If you have been skipping breakfast and causing your liver to produce glucose without food, by the time you are in your 40s and have been doing it for twenty or more years, you can start gaining weight, and your labs will start showing your cholesterol going up, along with other signs of pre-diabetes."

2. Look at what you eat at night. Many stick to the idea of not eating after 8 p.m. "I don't see a basis for that," says Payne. "You shouldn't eat a whole pizza after 8 p.m., but a small snack before you go to bed isn't

a bad idea, as it shortens your overnight fast." Payne recommends the snack be no more than half of a small lunch.

3. Use the Plate Method. Taking a basic 9" plate, one-half should be devoted to vegetables, one-quarter to protein and the remaining one-quarter to starchy stuff. "Even if you don't have it separated that way, use it for portion control," says Payne of the plate method. "We eat large portions because they are everywhere. Food portions in restaurants are so large it is training us to eat more. Your hand and your plate are the best guides for portion size though." A meat serving should be the size of the palm of your hand. Payne says that includes the thickness of the meat, too. So no more small-diameter, tall steaks!

4. Sloooooow down. "Whatever way you can come up with to eat slower will help you feel satisfied on less food," says Payne. "The feeling of fullness keeps building for an hour after you eat. If you eat in 10 minutes, all you have done is moved the food from your plate to your stomach. Eat slower, and you will find you can realize you are full."

5. Eat at least 3 times a day, but no more than 6 times. Eating several small meals spaced throughout the day will allow you to have a slow and steady supply of nutrients to your body and will help you keep from overeating. Of course, if you eat too many small meals, you can still overeat. "Don't graze all day, you totally lose track of what you're eating," says Payne.

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6. Your overnight fast should be no more than 10-12 hours. If you eat a snack at 9 p.m., eat something by 7 a.m. “It doesn’t have to be a lot of food to break the fast,” says Payne. Something as simple as a glass of milk, a banana, carton of yogurt or a piece of whole-wheat toast will suffice. “I steer clear of recommending cold cereal because it tends to give you a sugar rush. I think the best thing to start with in the morning is a little fresh fruit and some protein.” The goal is to choose foods that are slower to be utilized by your body.

7. Eat and chew your calories, don’t drink them. “A lot of people have no idea how many calories and carbohydrates are in their drinks,” says Payne, referring to many of the soda and coffee drinks Americans gulp down each year. “I really don’t see a place for regular pop in your diet,” she says. “Having pop on a regular basis, that speeds up insulin resistance. Diet pop doesn’t raise your blood sugar, but I still think you can over do it. There is nothing in diet pop that is good for you.”

8. Write it down. In research, over and over again, the single most effective way of losing weight is writing down what you eat. Set measurable goals in writing. “If it is just an idea in your head, it is fleeting,” says Payne. She recommends setting a plan of action, and deciding what you are going to do first.

“People have to find their own way,” says Payne of navigating a healthy eating plan. She emphasizes that you don’t have to give your favorite foods up for good. There is room for eating those special treats, as long as they are incorporated into a healthy plan. “We are hardwired to crave sweet, salty and fat foods,” she says. “We still have those taste buds, and food manufactures know that is what makes us like a food when we taste it.” Payne suggests occasionally having those items, but incorporating foods like fruits, vegetable and whole grains, which take longer for your body to digest and longer for them to release the sugar, into your diet in order to keep you full and healthy. **■**

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