

New Year Nutrition

If better nutrition is part of your New Year's resolution, keep in mind that the way you eat can often be as important as what you eat. Eating should be natural, healthy and pleasurable. But in our diet-obsessed culture, eating is often mindless, consuming and guilt-inducing instead. The cure? Mindful eating.

Mindful eating is about experiencing food more intensely by paying attention to the colors, smells, flavors and textures. It's also about realizing what's on your mind when you are eating and eliminating the distractions that can lead to poor choices. Try some of the following tips to help create more awareness during meals:

- Before opening the fridge, ask yourself, "Am I really hungry?" Gauge whether you are indeed hungry or if something else is going on.
- Plant a garden and cook. Anything that reconnects you with the process of creating food will magnify your mindfulness.
- Set your kitchen timer to 20 minutes and take at least that much time to eat a meal.
- Focus on the food only. Save the TV, phone and any other distractions for later.
- Think about the colors, tastes, flavors, smells and texture of the food as you eat.
- Take small bites and chew patiently. Try to slow down.
- Put your fork or spoon down in between bites. Take a breath and relax.

More Healthy Eating Habits

The beginning of a new year is a great time to start fresh and to make positive changes in your life. While setting new, healthier exercise, work and bedtime routines, set some new nutrition routines, too. That way you can look forward to a whole year of healthier eating. Here's how.

- Stock your pantry and refrigerator with a wide variety of foods, such as grains, vegetables and fruits, low-fat dairy products and lean meat or beans.
- Think about some healthy snacks, too. Dried fruit, low-fat yogurt and air-popped popcorn are healthy and tasty alternatives to sugary snacks.
- Limit sugar. Choose cereals with low or no added sugar. Try serving water or low-fat milk more often than sugar-sweetened sodas and fruit-flavored drinks.
- Cut down on salt. Keep the saltshaker off the table to avoid the temptation.
- Involve your children in planning and preparing meals. Children may be more willing to eat healthy dishes when they help fix them.
- Don't be too strict. In small amounts, sweets or fast food can still have a place in a healthy diet.
- Make sure to eat breakfast daily to get off to a good start and to avoid snacking.
- Take the time to enjoy your food as you eat it. Eating too fast or when your attention is elsewhere, such as when you are watching television, may lead to eating too many calories.
- Switch to a smaller plate, bowl and glass. Portion out foods before you eat.
- Designate one night during the week as "fruit and vegetable prep night" to clean, slice and dice fruits and vegetables. Ease of access makes it more likely that you will grab these items as a snack throughout the week.

Good Substitutes for Healthier Eating

Often the difference between a healthy meal and a not-so-healthy one is a couple of ingredients. Here are some simple ideas for making your meals more nutritious:

- Swap leaf lettuce for spinach on sandwiches and in salads.
- Instead of chips or pretzels, dip carrots, bell peppers or snap peas into hummus or low-fat ranch dressing.
- Make a hearty vegetable soup with potatoes, carrots, cabbage, mushrooms, tomatoes, celery, corn or chickpeas.
- Keep a bag of frozen vegetables in the freezer and add a handful to stir-fry and pasta dishes. Broccoli, peppers, mushrooms, cauliflower and carrots pack a lot of nutrition.
- Opt for a pizza with vegetables instead of meat toppings.