

Healthy attitude to food

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This article explains why it's important to have a healthy attitude to food. All your body needs to stay healthy is a good variety of foods eaten in the right amounts, plus a little exercise. When it's that simple, why is it that so many of us develop unhealthy eating habits? The blame may lie on our changing work and social culture. A survey by the charity Working Families reported many working parents said they no longer have time to cook healthy family meals. Convenience foods are becoming cheaper and easier to obtain and with 29 percent of people now living alone, you can begin to see why so many of us are developing unhealthy eating habits.

Learn what is healthy

According to the Food Standards Agency, a healthy diet should include:

- plenty of starchy (preferably wholegrain) foods, like bread, potatoes, pasta and rice
- lots of fruit and vegetables
- some protein-rich foods, including meat, fish, pulses and dairy
- very little or no salt
- minimum sugar and saturated fats

By following these basic nutrition rules, combined with 30 minutes of moderate exercise, five times a week, you can stay healthy.

How to change your eating habits

Changing your eating habits should be a gradual process. Don't be tempted into making drastic changes to your diet overnight. This is <> more likely to fail. Small, day-to-day changes in your eating habits will have a much bigger and longer-lasting impact than a short-term blitz.

Plan ahead

As with any life change, it's a good idea to make a plan before you start. The Royal College of Psychiatrists suggests that you keep a diary of everything you eat for a while, along with your thoughts and feelings. This will help you to identify times when you eat for emotional reasons rather than out of hunger.

Before embarking on a new eating plan, the British Dietetic Association suggests you think about the benefits of changing your eating habits. This may include having more energy, lowering your blood pressure or getting back into your old clothes. Also consider the downside of changing your eating habits.

It is worth considering the consequences of making no changes to your eating habits. You may keep gaining weight or you may have poor health in the long term. You may find yourself better prepared and more motivated to make dietary changes if you take

the time to think about why you want to change your eating habits and what you going to lose or gain by making these changes.

Set realistic goals

To ensure success, you need to set yourself realistic goals that are appropriate for you. Many psychologists use a system called SMART to help people set achievable goals. Below is an example of a SMART goal.

- Specific - I will take a packed lunch to work every day.
- Measurable - I will allow myself two chocolate bars a week.
- Achievable - I will switch to semi-skimmed rather than full-fat milk.
- Relevant - I will only eat convenience foods on Friday nights.
- Time-specific - I will make these changes before the end of the month.

Draw a list of five to 10 simple healthy eating goals. To help remember these, pin the list onto a fridge and do your best to stick to it.

Keep motivated

- It's easy to feel enthusiastic at first, only for your enthusiasm to dwindle as the weeks and months pass. Below are a few ideas you could try to help keep the momentum up.
- Gather support - tell your friends or family what you are doing and seek their support when things get tough.
- Build a mental picture of the person you want to be in the future, and keep it in mind.
- Write a list of things that make you feel good, such as reading a magazine or a long, hot soak in the bath, and build more of these things into your life.
- Fit some exercise into your routine, even if it's just 10 minutes a day - it's a natural mood booster.
- Reward yourself for all your successes, however minor - treat yourself to a trip to the cinema or have drink with a friend.

Further information

Food Standards Agency - www.eatwell.gov.uk - 020 7404 6504

Beat (formerly the Eating Disorders Association) - www.b-eat.co.uk

Weightwise - www.bdaweightwise.com