

4 Smart Food Moves

A FEW SMALL CHANGES ARE ALL IT TAKES TO FIGHT DISEASE AND FEEL AMAZING. BY ELIZABETH SOMER, R.D.

MAKE HEALTHY EATING YOUR GOAL AND YOU'LL BOOST ENERGY, help ward off disease, fuel more intense workouts and banish cravings. But overhauling your entire diet at once virtually guarantees you'll be back on burgers and fries in no time. Instead, start by adopting any or all of the smart moves below; we've provided expert tips and tricks to make them practically painless. Stay tuned for four more eat-healthy strategies in next month's issue.



1 SAVOR MEALTIME.

Enjoying every bite of a well-prepared meal instead of wolfing it down helps you consume fewer calories, since fullness cues have a chance to kick in before you're stuffed. This also prevents bloating, because you swallow less air. Here's how to get more satisfaction:

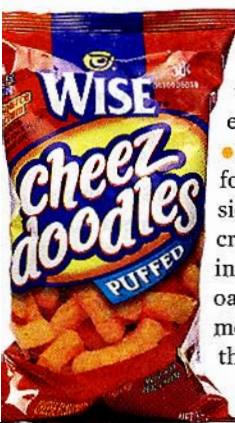
- **LISTEN TO YOUR BODY.** When you have the urge to eat at a time other than breakfast, lunch or dinner, ask yourself whether you're physically hungry (i.e., is your stomach growling?). If not, are you angry, bored, stressed, lonely? Write down these emotion-driven cravings in a journal, and take note of any patterns. Then come up with activities other than eating to deal with these feelings: Clean out an old file cabinet to de-stress, make a new iPod mix to beat boredom, or call a friend for a 10-minute gossip break to feel connected.

- **SETTLE IN.** Whenever possible, find a peaceful spot to eat, like a park bench near your office or your long-forgotten dining-room table. A recent study found that people who eat while distracted or in hectic, unpleasant environments (desk, car, in front of the TV) are significantly more likely to be overweight, according to study coauthor Deborah Kesten, an adjunct professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies. Focus on the taste, texture and aroma of every bite. Try to stretch meals to last at least 20 to 30 minutes.

- **MAKE IT FANCY.** Transform weeknight dinners into special events. Use the "good" china and silver, light candles, and set the mood with soft music. For restaurant-perfect presentation, serve foods in a variety of different colors at each meal, arrange main dishes and sides so that they're resting against each other rather than in three distinct piles, wipe any spatter from the edge of the plate, and garnish with sprigs of fresh herbs. "We eat with our eyes first," says Melanie Underwood, a food stylist and instructor at the Institute of Culinary Education in New York City. "If food doesn't look good, we assume it doesn't taste good either."

2 DUMP THE JUNK.

As your intake of processed and fast foods increases, so does your risk for obesity. Choosing foods in their most natural state—potatoes instead of chips, milk instead of shakes, blueberries instead of pie—almost always means more nutrients and fewer calories, fat, sugar and salt. Three ways to dial down the empty calories:



- **SWAP SMART.** Look for less-processed versions of the foods you're craving, like strawberries instead of Twizzlers or oatmeal instead of oatmeal-raisin cookies. Cynthia Sass, R.D., a spokesperson for the American Dietetic

Association, suggests satisfying a case of the munchies with a handful of a whole-grain cereal like Cheerios instead of chips. You can also shave a few hundred calories by having a Fudgesicle or fruit-juice bar instead of ice cream, says Lisa Young, Ph.D., R.D., an adjunct assistant professor of nutrition at New York University. Or try her favorite: "Dip a banana in chocolate, roll it in crushed peanuts, and freeze it."

- **EAT A BETTER BREAKFAST.** Trade doughnuts, toaster pastries and muffins for the gold standard of breakfasts: a bowl of whole-grain cereal, nonfat milk or soy milk and a piece of fruit, which will put your blood sugar on an even keel and ward off midday cravings.

- **LIGHTEN UP YOUR GROCERY CART.** The greater the variety of goodies you have stashed in your cupboard, the more you'll eat. "Limit the number of junk foods you throw in your cart to one a week," says Sass. That includes chips, candy, ice cream and any other food without at least 10 percent of the RDA for either protein, fiber or a vitamin or mineral.

- **SNACK DEFENSIVELY.** Prevent yourself from getting so hungry that you'll eat whatever junk is within reach. When running errands, bring healthy munchies along so that you'll be less tempted by the giant cinnamon rolls at the mall food court. Apples, nuts and whole-grain crackers are perfect portable snacks.

3 DRINK TO YOUR HEALTH.

The average American consumes more than 53 gallons of sugary soft drinks a year, even though this may raise the risk for hypertension, pancreatic cancer and tooth decay. Soda is the worst offender; each can ups your risk of becoming overweight. Diet sodas may be only the lesser of two evils, since there's evidence that their artificial sweeteners mess with the body's ability to regulate calorie intake. To hydrate the healthier way:

- **WEAN YOURSELF OFF SODA.** First, limit the damage by switching to diet. When you're ready to give it up altogether, try substituting your own homemade carbonated drink by mixing equal parts orange juice and sparkling water, suggests Jackie Newgent, R.D., a New York City-based culinary nutritionist. "You still get the fizz, but with some vitamin C—naturally," she says.

- **GET YOUR BUZZ FROM COFFEE OR TEA.** These caffeinated beverages do count toward your hydration needs; they're virtually calorie-free and pack loads of healthy antioxidants, unlike soda. If you add milk, make it skim. And get your fix between, rather than with, meals—compounds called tannins in coffee and tea block iron absorption from food by up to 94 percent.

- **SQUEEZE MORE OUT OF FRUIT.** Juice gets a bad rap for being sugary and high in calories. But it can also be a great source of antioxidants, as long as you choose 100 percent juice and stick to an eight-ounce serving. Try a warm mug of cider, which contains cholesterol-lowering phenols.

- **MAKE IT A VIRGIN.** Alcohol has seven calories per gram, almost as much as pure fat. When you want a fun, fancy drink and not a hangover, try blending mango, pineapple, lemon juice and rum extract for a virgin daiquiri that's packed with beta-carotene and vitamin C.

4 SHAKE THE SALT.

Nine in 10 Americans will develop high blood pressure unless they curb the risk factors right now, including dropping excess weight and cutting back on salt. A high sodium intake also promotes bloating and may raise your risk of osteoporosis by increasing calcium depletion. Aim to reduce your consumption to no more than 2,300 milligrams a day.

- **SLOWLY SHIFT YOUR PALATE.** Reduce your overall intake a little at a time and in a few weeks your taste buds won't even notice. Start by switching to coarse or kosher salt—the larger grains help you use less without sacrificing flavor. Next, take it off the table entirely at meals. "Sprinkle a hefty amount of herbs and spices onto dishes to enhance the taste so that you won't need as much, if any, salt," says Newgent. Or keep a bottle of hot sauce or balsamic vinegar on the table—they brighten the flavors in low-fat or unsalted dishes.

- **BE A LABEL QUEEN.** You can't always trust your taste buds; many foods that don't taste salty are still high in sodium. Choose only packaged foods that contain 200 mg or less of sodium per serving (600 mg or less for frozen dinners that will make up your entire meal). Some of the biggest offenders: soups, sauces and cold cuts. Canned goods like tuna, beans and veggies are also salt traps. Draining, rinsing and/or boiling the contents can remove 33 to 80 percent of the sodium.

- **ORDER WISELY.** From fast food to five-star restaurants, the fare has one thing in common: loads of salt. Steer clear of processed meats like bacon, sausage and pastrami, as well as certain cuisines, namely Chinese (soy sauce has over 1,000 mg per tablespoon!). Even an otherwise healthy Subway turkey sandwich can pack more than 1,000 mg of sodium; reduce your total by removing half the meat. At any deli, ask for sliced cucumbers instead of a pickle on the side; you'll slash more than 1,000 mg from your meal, says Young. ●

