



## Improving Your Diet for Optimal Health

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Many people focus on diet improvements because they feel they need to lose weight. It's true that obesity is a rising problem, but more importantly the issue of health is at the heart of it all.

If you think your diet needs improvement, you're not alone. It's true that *"you are what you eat,"* and your food choices determine how you feel every day. The proper choices enable your body to fight stress and disease and keep you in tip-top shape so that you look and feel good.

You can feel the benefits from proper nutrition almost immediately. With a few healthy changes to your diet, ***you can be feeling great in no time.***

### Try making the following changes to your diet:

- 1. Eat whole grains.** Given the choice between whole grains and refined grains, go with whole grain. You might just make a simple change like using wheat bread instead of white bread. The whole grain foods have naturally nutritious benefits. They're also loaded with more fiber, which is great for your digestive tract and can help you to feel full longer.
- 2. Avoid carbonated beverages.** Even the zero calorie alternatives can be addictive and bad for you. Regular colas and sodas contain a large amount of empty calories. Diet sodas trick your body into thinking that it's tasting sugar, leading to cravings for even more sweets.
- 3. Eat more fruits and veggies.** It's helpful to get plenty of fruits and veggies in your diet each day. Try eating more salads that are rich in vegetables. You can also start the day with a fruit plate or eat fruit as a tasty snack in between meals.

**4. Avoid coffee, alcohol, and sweets.** These are all items to be enjoyed only in moderation.

- You may crave coffee every day, but try to keep it to only one cup per day, if that.
- Studies have shown that a glass of wine in the evenings may actually provide health benefits. Other than that, an occasional drink is the recommended limit for alcohol.
- Sweets can pack on the pounds fast if they're eaten too frequently. They're best saved for special occasions.

**5. Balance your diet.** To maintain your health for the long run, your best bet is to ***find a healthy balance of all the necessary food groups***. You may be tempted to try a certain diet that excludes food groups, but that's not something you can or should stick to in the long run.

- Make a list of foods that you like in each food group and include something from each group in your meal plans.

**6. Give yourself a break.** Remember that you're trying to become healthier and happier. You don't want to become so obsessed with being healthy or thin that you become unhappy in the process. A diet that's too strict will also be harder to follow.

- If you have a weight loss goal, ensure that your goal is within the healthy range for your height. If you're tempted to try to be thinner than you really should be, this just leads to unhealthy behaviors.

**7. Drink plenty of water. *Water is the most important substance in your diet.***

Every cell in your body needs water in order to function properly. It also contains zero calories, so you never have to worry about it having an impact on your daily calorie intake.

It can be a challenge to change your diet. ***The easiest and most effective way to do it is to make one small change at a time.*** Get used to that change before you incorporate another one. Before you know it, you'll be making wise food choices by habit and enjoying optimal health.