

18 STEP PLAN TO HEALTHY EATING

Have the conflicting studies and the almost-daily flood of nutritional information left you bewildered about what foods are best for you? It doesn't have to be so confusing.

These simple tactics from ABC news - if you stick to them regularly - will help you get more of the stuff you need into your diet while eliminating the stuff you don't. The best part? Before long you'll be dining like a nutrition expert, without even thinking about it.

GLASS OF MILK

1. Drink a mug of skim milk first thing in the morning. Drink it until all that's left is the amount you'd normally add to your coffee; then pour your coffee on top. You just took in 25 percent of the vitamin D you need every day, and 30 percent of the calcium.

2. Drink a glass of water before every meal. This will do two things — keep you hydrated and make you eat a little less.

More sauce, less cheese

3. Eat pizza with more tomato sauce and light cheese. Tomato products are a rich source of lycopene, a type of carotenoid that's believed to cut your risk of cancer. Reducing the mozzarella by just one-third will save you 20 grams of fat.

4. Always order your sandwiches with double tomato slices.

5. Pile onions on everything. Research has revealed that onions are so healthy - they're a top source of heart savers called flavonoids.

JUNK FOOD

6. Whenever you eat fast food, drink a glass of water afterward. Burgers, subs, chips, and pizza are all loaded with fat and sodium, which can be bad for your heart. You can't do much about the fat once you've eaten it, but you can flush away some of the excess sodium by drinking water afterward.

7. Choose iced tea. A recent US Department of Agriculture study found that a serving of black tea had more antioxidants - crucial to your body's defense against heart disease, cancer, and even wrinkles - than a serving of broccoli or carrots.

8. Have an afternoon snack every day at 3 o'clock. A nutritional boost between lunch and dinner wards off fatigue and keeps you from overindulging later. Just don't scoff down a chocolate bar. Try yoghurt and fruit, crackers and cheese, an egg (hard-boiled), an apple, and a thirst-quencher like bottled water. All of these foods will give you long-lasting energy.

9. Always leave the skin on your fruit. If you peel apples or pears, you're throwing away nutrients and fibre. Same goes for potatoes. Peel oranges, but leave as much of the fibrous white skin under the rind as you can eat - it's loaded with flavonoids.

GO RED

10. Whenever you buy grapefruit, go for red instead of white. Lycopene (the colour in tomatoes that fights cancer) is responsible for the colour in ruby red grapefruit (watermelon and guava also have some).

11. Eat salmon once a week. Salmon is a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids, a type of fat most experts say we don't get enough of. Omega-3s seem to keep the heart from going into failure from arrhythmia.

WASH YOUR MEAT

12. Here's an easy way to cut the fat content of your meat: as soon as you finish browning the meat, pour it into a dish covered with a double layer of paper towels. Then put another paper towel on top and blot the grease. If you want to remove even more fat, rinse the meat in a colander under hot (but not boiling) water. The water will wash away fat and cholesterol. Using these methods together can cut 50 percent of the meat's fat content.

13. Whenever you have salad, keep the dressing on the side. Dip your fork in the dressing first, then spear a piece of lettuce, then eat it. Four tablespoons of honey-mustard dressing can have 60 grams of fat - nearly an entire day's worth.

14. Whenever you eat broccoli, put a little margarine, olive oil, or cheese sauce on it. Broccoli is a rich source of beta-carotene - one of the major antioxidants your body needs. But beta-carotene is fat-soluble, which means it needs fat molecules to digest properly.

15. Always have loads of vegetables. Your daily goal: Three servings minimum. A serving is 1/2 cup. Think of a tennis ball - it's about half a cup in volume.

WATCH THE FAT

16. Do a fat analysis before every meal. It's tempting to go fat-free at breakfast and lunch so you can indulge in a high-fat dinner. Studies show that, for several hours after you eat a meal with 50 to 80 grams of fat, your blood vessels are less elastic and your blood-clotting factors rise dramatically. Spread your fat intake over the whole day.

17. Always eat (a little) dessert. Here's why: Sweets such as cookies and low-fat ice-cream bars signal your brain that the meal is over. Without them, you might not feel full - which might leave you prowling for sugar all night.

18. Eat a bowl of dry cereal every night before you go to bed. A low-fat, low-calorie carbohydrate snack eaten 30 minutes before bed will help make you sleepy. Cereal is also one of the easiest ways to reduce your fibre deficit.

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