Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Creating healthy eating habits



In today's busy world, it can be increasingly difficult to focus on healthy eating – when it comes to crunch time, a lot of us reach for what is most convenient: fast food, frozen meals and snacks that lack nutrients. Like any habit, learning to eat healthy foods is within reach. Below we will go over some strategies for encouraging healthy eating.

What is the difference between healthy eating and dieting?
With new diets being promoted constantly and advertised online and in magazines, when we think of healthy eating we often think of dieting. However, they are not the same thing. Diets are usually something people do for a month or two and then drop and are most often geared towards fast weight loss that is rarely sustainable. Diets often focus on cutting calories and fats or restricting specific foods. Healthy eating habits are, however, about balance and about making choices that will continue throughout your life, not just for a brief period. In other words, diets are temporary while healthy eating habits are for life.

Why are healthy eating habits important?

Eating healthy foods consistently not only will regulate your weight but it will have long term positive effects on your overall health. Eating nutrient dense foods leads to healthier skin, improved digestive health, increased energy and focus and lowers your risk of diabetes and heart disease down the road. On top of all that, eating well is proven to improve your mood and sharpen your cognitive functioning.

Where to begin?

It can be overwhelming at first to switch to healthy eating habits. Some good rules of thumb are cutting out refined sugars, saturated fats and processed foods. If you eat a lot of those things, how do you shift a habit overnight? The answer is, you don't, not overnight. Start small and tweak your habits gently. Here are some ideas on where to begin:

- **2 out of 3 rule:** If two out of three of your meals in a day are home cooked – and we aren't talking canned or frozen here – this is a great start. Food you prepare yourself out of whole ingredients is going to be automatically much healthier than pre-packaged and restaurant food.
- **Fruits and nuts replace chips and chocolate:** Pack healthy snacks and bring them with you to school or work. These can be packets of raw nuts and seeds, fresh and dried fruits and plain unsweetened yogurts.
- **Change your grains:** Replace your white grains with brown ones and opt for whole grains: instead of white bread, eat whole grain bread, instead of white rice choose brown.
- **Drink water not sugar:** Replace your sodas and fruit juices with glasses of water and you will immediately begin to break the cycle of sugar addiction.
- **Everything in moderation, even moderation:** If you never allow yourself treats, you are going to feel miserable and left out when people around you are enjoying that delicious looking dessert or plate of fries at the end of the week. So indulge once in a while! If you are making healthy choices 90% of the time, allow yourself those treats the other 10%.

Habits can be hard to change but over time you will notice that the foods you crave are not what they used to be. The more you feed your body whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables and lean meats and legumes, the more these will be what your body asks for. That’s when you’ll know that what once felt like a “diet” has surely become a lifestyle.

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