

EMBRACE A HEALTHY MINDSET FOR EATING — NO MATTER THE OCCASION

Challenges with food around holidays and events.

Food presents a challenge during holidays and events because:

- Food is plentiful and readily available.
- Food items are unique when compared to everyday meals.
- Holiday foods are traditionally high in fat and calories.
- Family time often is structured around food and the act of eating.
- Food can be associated with feelings of love and security, and may remind you of people and events from the past.

Your exposure to food makes a difference

Unfortunately, the more available food is, the more you become exposed to triggers. Additionally, your resolve to abstain decreases each time you're placed in one of these situations.

Have you ever noticed you can go an entire day eating well, only to lose all control later? This is especially evident during instances where you experience what's known as "decision fatigue." This occurs when you may become more open and vulnerable to environmental cues with additional food exposures.

How to lessen your responsiveness to food triggers

Even if you don't struggle with addictive tendencies related to food, you still face many triggers throughout the year. The good news is there are behaviors and thoughts you can adopt to help lessen your responsiveness to food triggers and alter the way you approach eating, especially during holidays and events.

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Try these healthy eating habits for all occasions:

- Adopting a healthy eating mindset starts with identifying the reasons you want to eat healthier. What compelling reasons come up when you consider this question?
- Having a plan is one of the most important things you can do. Anticipate when you may have more difficulty making healthy choices, and create a solid plan for those times.
- Savoring your food and being mindful will help you make better choices than eating without conscious thought.
- Instead of moving from food dish to dish, first survey the options in front of you, and decide which ones you want and how much you want before adding food to your plate.
- It's also important to allow yourself a few unhealthy food options, but decide when and where you will make those choices.
- Finally, be aware of your negative emotions and manage those through healthier means rather than using food to deal with them.

Additional techniques to help modify your eating behavior include:

- Bringing fruit and vegetables to holiday gatherings to create more options for you and others.
- Eating a light snack before attending holiday events to lessen the likelihood of overeating.
- Measuring and portioning your food over the holidays.
- Increasing your level of activity and exercise.
- Committing to making changes with someone close to you.
- Banking your calories if you know you'll attend an event with more food options available.
- Don't despair if you temporarily lose control of your food choices. Remember, consistency is key and not perfection.

Lisa Hardesty, Ph. D. (2022, November 22). Embrace a healthy mindset for eating. Mayo Clinic Health System. <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/embrace-a-healthy-mindset-for-eating-no-matter-the-occasion>

10 NUTRITION MYTHS DEBUNKED

1. Eating healthy is too expensive.

It may take some planning and time in the kitchen, but eating healthy on a budget is possible.

Some helpful hints include:

- Plan meals and snacks around sales.
- Shop seasonally, especially with fruits and vegetables.
- Create a shopping list and stick to it.
- Stock up on staples, such as brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, dried beans and lentils, when on sale.
- Consider purchasing frozen or canned fruits and vegetables as an alternative to fresh products. Be sure to check the ingredient list to avoid items with added sugars or salt.

2. Everyone should follow a gluten-free diet.

Unless you have celiac disease or gluten intolerance, you don't need to avoid gluten, which is the protein found in wheat, barley and rye. Whole-wheat products have great nutritional benefits, including essential B vitamins and fiber.

Be mindful when manufacturers remove gluten, as additional sugar, salt or refined starches are often added to make up the difference in flavor and texture. If you follow a gluten-free diet for medical reasons, check the ingredient list and nutrition facts to make sure you are choosing a healthy option.

3. Use unrefined sugars, such as honey, maple syrup or coconut sugar in place of white table sugar.

Sugar is sugar, although unrefined sugar options may contain a small number of vitamins and minerals. The advantage is minimal as they are still considered added sugar and contribute to the recommended daily limit on added sugar in the diet.

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4. Full-fat products equal weight gain.

The fat-free and low-fat diet trend is a thing of the past — 80s and 90s to be exact. Yet, some individuals are still scared of fat. This shouldn't be the case as fat has beneficial functions like protecting our organs, maintaining cell membranes, promoting growth and development, and absorbing essential vitamins.

Be aware that fats aren't created equal. Choose heart-healthy unsaturated fats, such as olive and canola oil, nuts, nut butters and avocados over those that are high in saturated and trans fats, including fatty meats and high-fat dairy products.

5. Avoid carbs if you want to lose weight.

The low-carb diet is a fad diet that has continued to make an appearance over the years. It gives carbohydrates — fruit and whole grains included — a bad reputation. Individuals who followed this diet had success with weight loss. But anytime anyone eliminates highly processed carbohydrates foods, such as chips, cookies, white bread and potatoes smothered in butter and gravy, they would be expected to have the same results. Any diet or eating program that eliminates an entire food group gets a red flag from me as you likely will miss out on vital nutrients.

6. A detox diet will clean toxins out of the body.

There's little evidence that dietary cleanses do any of the things they promise. The fact is you don't need to purchase a product to cleanse your body. Your liver, kidneys and gastrointestinal tract do a good job of detoxing it every day. If you're looking to rejuvenate your body, focus on eating more whole foods, drinking water and removing highly processed foods from your diet.

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7. You shouldn't eat anything after 7 p.m. — not even a grape.

While late-night snacking can lead to weight gain or prevent weight loss, it's not because of the time on the clock. Instead, it's about why you're eating. It's common to reach for food for reasons other than physical hunger in the evening, whether it be a habit, boredom or craving.

8. Certain foods, such as grapefruit, cayenne pepper or vinegar, can burn fat.

Sorry, no foods burn fat, make you lose weight more quickly or increase your metabolism enough to have an effect on weight loss. Diets that focus on single foods, like those mentioned above, are restrictive and lack nutrients the body needs. They're also unsustainable, and any weight loss that may occur is a result of calorie restriction and likely will come back once you discontinue.

9. The best way to decrease your sodium intake is to stop using the salt shaker.

The 2020–2025 dietary guidelines for Americans recommend having no more than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day. The average American consumes 3,400 milligrams of sodium per day. The problem isn't as easy as taking the salt shaker off the table. Much of the excess sodium that Americans consume from their diet comes from the salts added to processed, ready-to-eat foods and restaurant meals. Limit the processed foods, and enjoy more fresh, home cooked meals.

10 NUTRITION MYTHS DEBUNKED

10. Low-fat or fat-free products are healthier choices.

Many products labeled low-fat or fat-free contain added sugar or sodium to help make up for the loss of flavor when removing or reducing fat. In addition, fat helps with satiety — making you feel fuller longer. Choosing a fat-free product to reduce calories can backfire as you may find yourself snacking soon after.

Always look at the nutrition label when choosing between fat-free, low-fat and regular. Pay attention to sugar and sodium content.

Allyn Wergin, R. D. N. (2024b, March 20). 10 common nutrition myths debunked. Mayo Clinic Health System. <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/10-nutrition-myths-debunked>

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EAT SMARTER: EAT THE RAINBOW CHALLENGE

Fruits and vegetables have many health benefits. They can improve your vision and immune system, and they can decrease inflammation and your risk of chronic disease.

This month, try to eat at least two fruits and vegetables from each color category in the chart below. In addition to eating a variety of colors, try fruits and vegetables that are new to you or your family.

COLOR	NUTRIENTS AND BENEFITS	TRY	COMPLETE
RED	Lycopene improves heart health, decreases prostate and breast cancer risk, contributes to stroke prevention and increases brain function.	Tomatoes, beets, radishes, cherries, strawberries, red onions and red peppers.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
ORANGE AND YELLOW	Carotenoids reduce the risk of heart disease and inflammation, strengthen the immune system, build healthy skin and improve vision.	Carrots, winter squash, apricots, yellow peppers, sweet potatoes, bananas, pineapple, mangoes, pumpkins, peaches and oranges.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
GREEN	Indoles and isothiocyanates may help prevent cancer and are typically high in vitamin K, potassium, fiber, folic acid and antioxidants.	Spinach, arugula, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, avocado, kiwi, green tea, asparagus, fresh green herbs, kale and artichokes.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
BLUE AND PURPLE	Anthocyanins and antioxidants help lower blood pressure and reduce the risk of stroke and heart disease and are associated with improved brain health and memory.	Blueberries, blackberries, eggplant, figs, purple cabbage, concord grapes and plums.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
WHITE AND BROWN	Flavonoids and allicin can reduce cholesterol and blood pressure, improve bone strength, and decrease risk of stomach cancer.	Onions, mushrooms, cauliflower, garlic and leeks.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

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