

[IMAGE]

Healthy Up Your Diet

By Sara Tiner

We're in a war, pure and simple, and the majority of Americans are losing it. We're fighting formidable opponents including the fast-food industry, the soft drink manufacturers, and any company that mass produces processed and preservative-, artificial ingredient-laden food. It's time to healthy up your diet and shift the balance of food power. Are you ready to make healthier choices for a healthier life? It's not as hard as you think.

These days, we all get plenty of advice on how to avoid the worst food choices, from "Don't buy the 'meal' at a fast-food restaurant" to "If you need to run into the convenience store, take only enough cash for the purchase" to "Stay on the perimeter of the grocery store; that's where the healthier foods [e.g., fruits and vegetables] are." But what if garbage bags or cat food are on your grocery list? Should we hire a shopping mercenary for a quick, temptation-free retrieval of these necessities from the "bad" middle section of the store? Maybe we should teach our cats to eat lettuce. (Good luck with that.) Really, the only way to tame the processed food monster is to outsmart it.

Unfortunately, the deck is stacked. Food advertising promotes the unhealthiest items - overloaded with fat and piled high at two to three times what an adult portion should be. Food is available everywhere we go - in vending machines at schools and gyms, food courts at department stores and malls, restaurants that take your phone/fax/online order so you can pick up a meal on your way home, drive-thru coffee, fast food ... the list is seemingly endless. Add these facts of life to the reality that many of us are increasingly sedentary at both our jobs and in our leisure activity, and Houston, we have a problem.

Too Much Weight = Trouble

Healthy up your diet - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark It's no secret that obesity and its associated diseases can have serious health consequences. Over the past 34 years, hospitalization costs for obesity have soared: up \$92 million for child admissions and \$31 million for adults. And once the scale says we're overweight, not to mention obese, our overall risk for a host of health problems increases.

Conditions Associated With Overweight/Obesity

Nutrition is complex and highly individualized. Each person has different caloric needs, activity levels and food likes/dislikes. The key is to spend some time thinking about what we eat and how we eat. Then we can make strategic changes that will allow us to fuel up without ballooning up.

Get the Most From Your Food

Food is fuel, but it's so much more. Eating is often the most reliable social part of our day with family or friends. It represents a chance to care for others or ourselves. What we ate as children can comfort us or bring back wonderful memories. And trying new foods can heighten our senses and provide the thrill of novelty. But at its foundation, food needs to be what it is - fuel. If our way of feeding others or ourselves puts us on a path toward obesity or its related diseases, then we're misusing food. As a habitual tool for comfort or as a reward, food can become an instrument for the psyche and takes on a role it isn't strictly meant to play.

A Strategic Plan to Healthy Up Your Diet

Eating healthy is a process. We look at where we are, see where we want to be and figure out how to get there. To look at where we are, we need to examine our habits and food choices.

As an example, let's say we've fallen into the habit of grabbing a mocha coffee drink (with whip, of course) on the way to work, and heck, why not a scone? So, before we even check our e-mail, we've consumed (assuming a 2,000 calorie-a-day diet), 39.5% of our daily calories, 55% of our total fat, 22% of our sodium, 34% of our carbs (assuming we're getting about 60% of calories from carbs), and 20 grams of protein.

Food	Calories	Total Fat	Cholesterol	Sodium	Carbs	Protein
Mocha	330	15 g	50 mg	130 mg	43 g	13 g
Blueberry Scone	460	22 g	75 mg	420 mg	61 g	7 g
Total	790	37 g	125 mg	550 mg	104 g	20 g

With the exception of the protein, those are pretty sobering figures. More sobering, what you've consumed will still leave you craving a mid-morning snack, and probably sooner than later. How about substituting a coffee/hot chocolate mix and toast? Well, that's better: 18% of our daily calories, 19% of total fat, 9% of sodium and 8% of our calories from carbs, with 11 grams of protein. And we're getting good fats from the peanut butter and fiber from the bread

Food	Calories	Total Fat	Cholesterol	Sodium	Carbs	Protein
Coffee / Hot Chocolate	122	2.5 g	0 mg	5 mg	0 g	0 g
2 slices of toast (whole wheat)	138	2 g	0 mg	218 mg	22 g	7 g
Natural peanut butter (1 tablespoon)	94	8 g	0 mg	2.5 mg	3 g	4 g
Total	354	12.5 g	0 mg	225.5 mg	25 g	11 g

Easy Versus Healthy

father and son eating salad - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Is it more work to remember to pack a hot-chocolate packet, and bread with peanut butter? That depends. Which is harder - carrying lunch or tacking on an extra hour of aerobics to your gym visit? On average, a 240-pound person will need to do one hour of water aerobics or similar activity to burn the 436-calorie difference between these two meal options, according to the Mayo Clinic. So, if we're talking easy, it's actually easier to *not* put weight on than have to try and work it *off*.

That said, healthy eating requires some planning. Here are a few meals and some key ingredient substitutions that can help keep unnecessary calories out of your mouth (and body):

Making Healthier Choices: Some Key Things to Consider

- **Preparation** - Simple changes like replacing milk/butter with low-sodium chicken broth, baking food instead of frying, and using grape seed oil for cooking instead of butter can make a real, long-term

difference in your health.

- **Focus** - Don't bring more stress into the process! By taking a good look at where you are, health-wise, and talking to your health care practitioner about what you should focus on (reducing sodium or carbohydrate intake, getting more fiber, increasing your "good" cholesterol, etc.), you can get a handle on the changes that will make the most difference in your health.
- **Variety** - Food boredom can mean you dread lunch and leave it sitting in the fridge at work, choosing to drive off with co-workers for a burger and fries instead. Making meals as interesting as possible means we will look forward to eating and enjoy it.
- **Veggies** - Trying to fit a vegetable into every meal or snack gets us closer to the 4-5 cups recommended by the USDA.
- **Realism** - Unless a chef plans your meals, we're each responsible for making our own healthy choices. Know what is realistic for you and change what you can. When you're comfortable with the changes you made, re-evaluate your diet again and see what can be tweaked. Stepping down from a mocha to coffee/hot chocolate can lead to a step down to green tea - a drink that both supports your health and warms you up!

Making healthier choices isn't easy, certainly not these days and certainly not when it comes to food, but the choices you do make can make a big difference. No one's telling you swear off your favorite foods (if they happen to be less-than-optimal in terms of nutrition); it's about shifting the balance of what you eat so you end up with more healthy foods and less unhealthy ones. Now that's a recipe for long-term health and wellness.

REPLACING THIS WITH THAT: How to Improve the Health Profile of Common Meals

Improve the Health Profile of Common Meals - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark

apple measurement - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **Watch What You Eat**

Here are just a few of the health problems associated with obesity:

- Type 2 diabetes
- High cholesterol
- Some cancers

- Stroke
 - Osteoarthritis
 - High blood pressure
 - Liver/gallbladder disease
 - Gynecological problems
 - Sleep apnea and respiratory problems
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