

# Life's Simple 7: Eat Better

Hi, I'm Cindy. Let's talk about what it takes to give your body the best possible fuel for healthy living. Don't worry. I won't be pushing you into buying a wheatgrass juicer or making your own barley pasta. This is just a simple and sensible plan for eating well and feeling your best. A little planning makes a big difference.

I've found that one of the best ways to improve my diet is to plan for it. Feeling good is important to me, in fact, it's critical. I work in a psychiatric office and when I don't feel well, it's hard to be supportive and cheerful. So one way I care for myself is by eating well. Once a week, I make sure my kitchen is stocked with healthy options for my whole family. We used to live by the grab and go plan, just throwing something together based on whatever was in the fridge at the time

I can remember asking myself, 'What would I make with ketchup, pickles, butter, sliced ham, and an old onion.' Definitely not a plan for long-term success!

So how do you plan for good nutrition? One day at a time. And your daily choices can add up to a life plan for healthier living.

Choose a wide variety of foods that are high in nutrition and fiber and low in cholesterol and fat.

Each day, you'll want to include lots of fruits and vegetables, whole-grain carbohydrates, and fat-free or low-fat dairy products. Train yourself to avoid foods and drinks with added sugar and to regularly include fish rich in omega-3s. Great for your heart and your brain. These guidelines are important for your whole family. Everyone in the house will benefit from eating this way.

Prepare lean meats and poultry without adding extra saturated fats and trans fats. One more important, heart-healthy tip, cut back on salt and sodium. No, that doesn't mean your life is about to turn bland. There are many delicious herbs and spices to add flavor to your foods without increasing your sodium.

You might be concerned that making these changes would take too much time, or you would have to give up too much of what you like to eat. And yes, some people say healthy eating is an acquired taste, but I can all but guarantee you will notice a difference in your energy level and your tastes will change. I can't even imagine wanting to go back to a diet of junk food.

Be aware of your food choices.

Good planning starts at the grocery store. I don't buy foods that aren't a part of a healthy eating plan. Take a look in your refrigerator and pantry. Is your kitchen stocked for success?

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What do you see? Do you have plenty of healthy options on hand? Take notice and keep a food journal even if you only do it for one or two days. It will help you become aware of what you eat and find out how your choices measure up. So let's look at what's in my pantry. I've got whole grain cereal, oats, whole-wheat bread, whole-grain crackers and pasta, and lots of heart healthy seasonings. And for the refrigerator, I've stepped up on fresh fruits and veggies, fat-free yogurt, and healthy proteins. If I had a bunch of junk foods around here, I'd be tempted to eat it whenever I was in a hurry. So now, when I'm in a hurry, I grab an apple instead. It's planned that way. A plan for success.

Okay, let's imagine you're with your family for a holiday meal and your relatives are passing around the butter, and cheese casserole, gravy, sausage delight, what are you going to do to make healthy choices? Here's what I do. It's a simple way to get you started. I imagine my plate divided into three sections like a pie chart. In this section, I'll choose colored vegetables like a spinach salad, or maybe steamed broccoli, baked sweet potatoes, or green beans. You could always offer to bring items like these to the family gatherings if they aren't usually available.

In the next area, I'm looking for a lean meat like fish or baked chicken. Or a protein from beans. In the third section, I choose either a whole grain or another vegetable or a fruit, depending on what's available and what I've already eaten that day.

This visual keeps it simple and easy for me to plan good nutrition and variety.

And let's say it's a special day and I want to enjoy desert with the whole family. I cut a small serving of about 2 or 3 bites and savor each bite, eating slowly. I'm not missing out on the experience, but I'm also guarding myself from loading up on empty calories, fats and sugars.

The health factors in the simple 7 works together. So when you improve your eating habits, you will likely improve your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugars, and your weight too. I'm planning for many years of living well. And I hope you'll join me and put the simple 7 to action in your life today.