

SMART CHOICE

Put knowledge into action and transform your life

by Dr. Gregory Curnew

EATING RIGHT is the key to good health. But what does it mean? One day we hear about a revolutionary diet that guarantees weight loss. The next, we hear that it doesn't keep the pounds off. What we need is good basic information about nutrition and an action plan to reform the way we eat.

Cardiovascular disease can lead to heart attack and stroke, and kills over 70,000 Canadians every year. And the two major risk factors for cardiovascular disease, hypertension and high cholesterol are intrinsically related to what we eat. Medications can provide important protection, but why take meds if you don't have to? Dietary changes, weight loss and changes in activity levels can lower blood pressure and prevent cholesterol levels from climbing into the danger zones.

If lifestyle change is so successful, why don't we do it?

It's not always easy to change behaviour. Education and knowing why to eat right is an essential first step, but it's not always enough. A recent Heart and Stroke report demonstrated that despite the fact that people are becoming ever more educated in Canada, 58% of Canadian baby boomers thought their weight had little or no effect on their heart health. We might be smarter, but we're still eating the wrong foods.

There's no simple answer to why people don't follow their doctor's advice on nutrition and exercise. Belief and motivation are major factors in making lifestyle changes and are something your doctor can help you with. If you answer "no" to any of the following questions, further discussion with your healthcare team is probably warranted.



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1. Do you believe that **you** can have an impact on your health?
2. If your doctor has told you that you have a heart problem, do you believe and understand that your heart disease is **serious**?
3. Do you believe in the **treatment**?

Necessary but not sufficient

Belief in yourself and the treatment, and understanding of the seriousness of your illness provide a necessary

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foundation for lifestyle change, but they may not be enough to get you moving. The technicalities of how to initiate change and follow through with a plan can foil the best intentions. Your physician may not have the time to discuss with you exactly how to initiate lifestyle changes, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't seek help. Registered dietitians can be most helpful. In addition, many accredited web sites offer up information on healthy diet plans.

Take the matter into your own hands and enlist a friend, partner or co-worker to help you out. Together, discuss the changes you need to make, your goals and how you'll go about achieving them. Be realistic and take it one step at a time. Be sure to try your chosen plan of action for at least 30 days. Having a partner in crime can make lifestyle changes more fun and more successful.

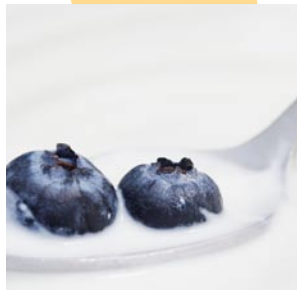
You are what you eat

Yankee Stadium has gone through four major renovations and with each upgrade, the seats get wider. French fries are the number one consumed vegetable in North America. A Big Mac trio, complete with fries and coke, contains 2,060 calories: as many calories as the average person needs per day.

It's becoming increasingly challenging to be healthy. The abundance of fast foods (most should be called **fat** foods!), combined with a relative lack of exercise, is the major contributor to heart disease. ▶



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THE RULE OF 8

CONSUME LESS:

- Red meat
- Salt
- Fried food and junk food
- Soda drinks



CONSUME MORE:

- Fruit and vegetables
- Fatty fish or other sources of good fat (salmon oil capsules, walnuts and almonds)
- Whole grain products (whole wheat bread & pasta, bran, barley & oatmeal)
- Milk products (milk and yogurt with 2% fat or less) and soy products (soy drinks, tofu, and soy hotdogs)



Small, incremental changes in nutrition will eventually lead to a drop in pounds and blood pressure, and may even prevent some types of cancer. What's important is to maintain a healthy weight and eat right. Instead of looking at your consumption meal by meal, focus on your overall eating pattern over an extended period of time. And rather than pour over this or that diet, try using the Rule of 8 — a simplified version of established dietary information that will help you make healthy eating decisions.

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The Rule of 8: eat more...

The Rule of 8 involves increasing the consumption of 4 good foods and decreasing consumption of 4 bad foods.

1. Vegetables and fruit

Try to eat five to 10 servings of fruit & veggies every day. It's not as hard as it sounds. Eat one piece of fruit (apple, orange, banana...) before a meal and be sure every meal includes at least one serving of vegetables. The greener the better when it comes to veggies! Learn about the glycemic index of foods so you make healthier choices. For example, eating peas or carrots can actually lower your blood sugar.

2. Good fats

Fatty fish, like salmon, mackerel, sardines, pollock, and tuna are excellent source of omega 3, one of the "good" fats. Try to eat it four times a week. If you don't like fish, consider fish oil capsules, like salmon oil. Canola oil is also healthy if consumed in small amounts. Flax seeds and some nuts like walnuts and almonds are also excellent sources of "good" fat.

3. Grain products

Instead of white bread, buy whole wheat and whole grain breads. Whole grain cereal and pastas are also good, and just as flavourful. Oat bran, oatmeal, brown rice, wheat bran and barley are other healthy food choices in this area.

4. Milk & soy products

Two to four servings of milk products every day are essential for proper nutrition and strong bones. But

some of the good effects are cancelled out if you choose products high in fat. Instead, opt for milk and yogurt containing less than 2% fat and cheese containing less than 20% milk fat. Flavoured yogurts are a delicious and tasty way to incorporate more milk products into your diet. Add some fruit to a bowl of low-fat yogurt and you've got a healthy and delicious dessert.

Soy products are an excellent source of protein, low in fat and an excellent substitute for meat. As more and more people are discovering the joys of soy, food manufacturers are finding new ways to liven it up. Give it a chance and you might be surprised! Vanilla-flavoured soy milk (make sure it's calcium fortified) and soy hot dogs could become staples in your house too.



The Rule of 8: eat less...

5. Red meat

Beef is very high in "bad" fat, and substituting with alternatives like skinless poultry, fish, beans and egg whites is a great way to cut out the fat. If you do go for beef, choose lean meat more often. Some physicians recommend eating one serving or less of red meat per week.

6. Salt

Only a fraction of your sodium intake comes from your saltshaker; the rest is already in your food. Anything from a can, box or that's pre-processed is likely to be high in salt. Flavour your food with pepper or green herbs (like basil, oregano or rosemary) instead of salt.

7. Junk food

The average North American consumes just less than 50 teaspoons of sugar every day. Eating fewer calories should be the one number priority for people trying to lose weight or maintain a healthy weight. Fried foods and foods with added fat (like gravy & mayonnaise) are full of empty calories. Just like good and bad fats, there are also good and bad carbohydrates. Simple sugars, found in soda pop and junk food (chips, donuts, cookies, candy, pies and cakes) are full of bad carbs. They may satisfy your craving for sweets, but they rarely satisfy real hunger. Instead, make a meal out of beans, barley, sweet potato or lentils. Chances are, you won't have room for dessert!

8. Soda

It's far better to eat your calories than drink them. Many people don't realize that one glass of orange juice — which should be your daily limit — contains between 100 and 200 calories, while one orange has less than 100 calories. You definitely feel fuller after the orange than the juice. Aim to drink two liters of low-calorie fluids like water or green tea every day.

Forgive yourself

You might fall off the wagon every once in a while. In a moment of weakness, you'll eat that bag of super fatty potato chips. Don't beat yourself up. No one's perfect. What's important is making a healthy lifestyle change you can stick to permanently.

Just prevent it!

Prevention is all about not taking your health for granted. Look at your eating habits and map out what changes are realistic for you. Talk to your doctor and ask for a referral to a dietician. Changing your eating and exercise habits is a big step on the path to a healthier, happier and longer life. 