



A Healthy Lifestyle ... in 5-9 Steps

Obesity is becoming a serious health problem in the United States. Estimates indicate that 2/3 of the US population is overweight. Fast food is loaded with fat and preservatives and provides little nutritional value. The average man needs 2000-2500 calories per day. Unfortunately, the average woman only needs 1400-1800. Many restaurants meals contain your daily requirements in one meal! It feels like the deck is stacked against us!

I wanted to fight back! So I started reading books and websites that would teach me ways to improve our family's nutrition and live a healthier lifestyle.

As I read, I came across the book, *5 A Day: The Better Health Cookbook*, Dr. Elizabeth Pivonka and Barbara Berry wrote:

"Imagine a scientific discovery that could save three to four million people a year from developing cancer; that would reduce your risk of heart disease by 40%; that could knock out almost half of neural birth defects; that may help eliminate the need for high blood pressure medication, and help control blood sugar naturally. This one amazing development could save us billions of dollars a year in medical costs, lost productivity and lost lives. *And if this one discovery were available, who wouldn't jump at the chance to get their hands on it?*"

They go on to say that *the answer lies in the supermarket*, particularly the produce aisle.

Eat your fruits and veggies.

The Better Health Foundation sponsors the *5 a Day program* which recommends five servings of fruits and vegetables each day for children. They have recently raised the number to include five-nine servings for adults.

Seventy-five percent of Americans aren't coming close. People perceive that :

- five servings seems like too much
- and the price of produce is too high.

If the amount seems overwhelming, remember that a serving is:

- ½ cup of most fruits and vegetables
- medium-sized apple, pear or plum

There are two exceptions:

- a serving of raw leafy greens is 1 cup
- a serving of dried fruit is ¼ cup.

If cost is an issue, listen to this: the USDA analyzed pricing on 69 fruits and 85 vegetables and found that the cost of eating three servings of fruit and four servings of vegetables was only 64 cents a day.

The Color Way is a method of tracking your fruit and vegetable intake by dividing fruits and vegetables into 5 color groups: blue/purple, green, white, yellow/orange, and red. They recommend eating one of each color group daily because each color offers different health benefits. They make this idea appealing to children by calling it: *rainbow on my plate*. This has really worked for my youngest son, who actively works to get all five every day!

Marcia Zimmerman, author of *7-Color Cuisine*, recommends eating seven colors a day. Her list includes five fruits and vegetables and then the tan and earth tones of grains and legumes and creamy whites of eggs, fish and other animal proteins. She says that “nature’s healing colors abound in fruits, legumes, vegetables, whole grains and healthy oils. The colors in whole foods are actually pigments that come from a special class of chemicals know as phytonutrients. When you eat foods of a particular color, you access their particular healing powers.”

The New American Plate is the latest from the American Institute of Cancer Research. They suggest that Americans get away from having a large piece of meat and a small portion of vegetables. They prefer a ratio of 2/3 fruits, vegetables and whole grains and 1/3 or less of protein.

Becoming a flexitarian is another emerging trend. A flexitarian consumes a diet that is 80% plant-based and 20% protein based. They recommend going easy on processed meats like cold cuts and sausage. This is a good solution for people who aren’t ready or don’t want to completely eliminate meat from their diets, but recognize the health benefits of eating more fruits and vegetables.

Get Moving.

The consensus seems to be, increase your awareness of nutrients in food and be involved in some sort of physical activity, daily. Sixty percent of Americans do not get enough physical activity. Twenty-five percent are not active at all! Any change you make in these areas will make a difference in your overall health.

Buy produce locally.

Registered Dietitian Barb Demlow advises eating whole foods, the closer to nature the better. She encourages buying produce locally. Local Harvest, a non-profit agricultural research group states it this way: “food produced in factory farms (most of the produce grown in the US) is picked four to seven days before it arrives on supermarket shelves, and is shipped an average of 1500 miles before it’s sold. That downtime can cause the produce to lose up to half of its nutrients.” Barb prefers frozen fruits and vegetables to canned. The flash freezing process

seals in the nutrients, keeping the product fresher.

Think outside the box.

Cooking from scratch is the answer. Home cooking saves money, storage space and adds less packaging waste to our environment. Plus there is the benefit of avoiding all of the preservatives that processed foods contain.

How many times have you looked at a label and couldn't pronounce the ingredients? Nutrition expert, Marion Nestle, Ph.D. says, "Avoid processed and packaged foods and you'll never need to decode labels."

Make healthy choices.

At the grocery store, read labels carefully. Pay attention to serving size and preservatives. Here are a few brands that I like because I recognize all of the ingredients and the product tastes good:

- 1) *Amy's Organic Frozen Burritos.*
- 2) *Salsa Lisa.* This is made locally and tastes great.
- 3) *Seasons of Change* pasta sauce. It costs more than Prego or Classico, but its worth it...and it's natural.
- 4) *V8 Fusion.* Three servings of fruit loaded into one container. If this tastes too sweet for you, cut it with water or drink it on the rocks.
- 5) *Bear Naked granola.* I love this but its pricey. I've been experimenting with my own recipe, see below.
- 6) *Sesmark Savory Thins.* This is a thin cracker with a nice crunch and all natural ingredients.

Prepare foods healthfully. Boil, steam or roast instead of frying. Use water when sautéing to reduce the use of oil. Fry in a non-stick pan. These tricks help you use less fat and they create a better product. Puree baby food. Whip up your own sauces or salad dressings. Make substitutions. Applesauce can be used in place of oil. Honey can replace sugar. Here are a few more ideas:

- 1) Make your own granola. Add oats, almonds, craisins, raisins, pecans, coconut to canola oil and honey. Bake slowly in the oven. Use less time and more honey for a chewy texture. I'm still working on the perfect combination.
- 2) [Fresh fruit salad](#). This fruit salad will last for a couple days in the fridge and kids love it! Add more fruit to the mix when it runs low. Bananas are better when added closer to serving time.
- 3) I have a friend who avoids preservatives in microwave popcorn by using a Whirley*Pop popcorn popper. www.popcornpopper.com If you add 1 tablespoon of sugar it becomes kettle corn.
- 4) Roast vegetables. It's so easy and is a great way to add a flavorful side dish. Just preheat the oven to 450°. Coat the pan with olive oil, add minced garlic or

onion, salt and pepper to taste. Roast chopped zucchini, potatoes, peppers and carrots. In the summer, add garden fresh rosemary.

5) Start your day with a smoothie. Here's our recipe for banana-blueberry: 1 banana, 1 c. frozen blueberries, and 1 cup nonfat plain yogurt. Blend on high speed until smooth. Makes 2 servings.

6) Make your own vinaigrette. Whisk 1 Tablespoon Dijon mustard and 3 Tablespoons of fresh lemon juice. Add ¼ cup olive oil in a steady stream until emulsified. Season with coarse salt and ground pepper.

7) Make your own fresh [salsa](#). Technically, I guess this is Pico de gallo, because it isn't cooked. It is great to serve on the side with chicken or Mexican dishes. Or just eat with chips.

Additional Resources:

There are several non-profit and government agencies that offer very helpful information. Here are a few sites that I found helpful:

www.mealsmatter.com (Dairy Council of California)

www.aicr.org (American Institute for Cancer Research)


www.5aday.org (Better Health Foundation)

www.eatright.org (American Dietetic Association)

www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines (Department of Health and Human Services)

www.MyPyramid.gov (United States Department of Agriculture)

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