

Creating a Healthy Diet: Change is Possible

Evidence-Based Strategies for Success



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The Power of Prevention: Your Health Is In Your Own Hands

There's so much we can't control in our lives, including our family health history passed along to us through genetic factors and childhood experiences. But there is good news! A staggering 80% of chronic diseases like heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and stroke—and 40% of cancers—are preventable through modifiable lifestyle changes. And diet is the single largest contributing factor.

There are many different foods and beverages at the heart of a health-giving, disease-preventing diet, and one size doesn't fit all. All of this is covered in [Food & Nutrition: What Everyone Needs to Know](#), my newest book. Still, while nutrition knowledge is empowering—and I'm talking about what science has shown, not what celebrities and food bloggers tout—it's seldom adequate to facilitate behavior change, let alone sustain long-lasting transformation. Plus, most readers live in food-abundant areas with ubiquitous temptations. Who *doesn't* want another piping hot slice of NYC cheese pizza? (I'm talking about myself here.)

Change is hard. But it is possible to change how you eat, and science shows how. And guess what? You're the creator of the diet that works best for your life—and occasional indulgences are definitely encouraged in what I call "Healthy Hedonism" which keeps pleasure at the center of a life-affirming plate.

Keep reading for some key strategies to get you started on the road to health, and grab a copy of my book for the complete dietary details of why what we eat matters, from farm to fork.

Did you know that as much as eighty percent—80%!—of chronic diseases are preventable through modifiable lifestyle changes such as diet?

Let's do this.

Let's Start at the Very Beginning (It's a Very Good Place to Start)

Leaping into action, particularly extremes like going on a very-low-calorie weight loss diet or becoming a vegan overnight, works for some people. Yet even those who jump right in will benefit from taking a breath and contemplating the following questions, which will help orient you to where you are now, where you want to go, and how you'll get there.

It's time to do a little dietary soul searching.



What is your ultimate diet and health goal, and why? Weight loss? More energy to play with kids? Looking fabulous? (And why not?) Be specific, write down your answers, and return to the list often when motivation wanes.



What does your diet actually look like? (*No, really; this is a judgment-free zone.*) There are many ways to measure your diet—including the what, when, how, and where—but the key is being honest with yourself to learn where your challenges lie.



What drives your everyday food choices? Taste, cost, and convenience are common, but are you eating because you're bored? Depressed? Or just because it's *there*? Think about it.



What is your strategy for obtaining your dietary goals? There are tons of resources and online apps to assist you, just make sure they're science-based and not bunk. Having a specific plan is important.



How will you sustain dietary changes? Will friends and family help, or do you need to find an in-person or online community? And it's okay to reach out to health professionals like nutritionists and therapists, too; that's why they're there!



How will you reward yourself for achieving your goal(s)? Choose something meaningful and of value, something that makes you happy. You deserve it!





Seven Practical Tips and Strategies to Create and Sustain Good Eating, for Life

(in no particular order)

1 Detox Your Diet

Nope, not *that* kind of detox. Forget fad diets and commercial programs touting specific foods and concoctions that cleanse your system. Sure, some foods do have detoxifying actions: the human body is a wondrous machine, with organs and systems to rid it of noxious substances. But it's the whole diet that matters most. Plus, scientific studies show that a kitchen clean-up—removing all tempting foods—have significant effects on your health and weight. Don't make things harder than it needs to be: Ice cream, cookies, potato chips, and the like should not live in your home, and certainly not at arm's length like on a kitchen counter or in a desk drawer. Likewise for your work office. Save foods like these for special occasions.

2

Limit Mealtime Choices

Variety is the spice of life, indeed, and it's also a central tenet of nutrition: eating a rich array of foods (they're all discussed in [Food & Nutrition](#)) contributes to health and longevity. But numerous studies show that offering lots of different dishes at mealtime leads to more calories, contributing to weight gain. (Just think about Thanksgiving.) It's easy to see how too many tasty choices offered with huge plates encourage overeating, just like keeping a scrumptious assortment of snacks in the pantry. It certainly does for me; I just don't have that kind of willpower. These are the same reasons to steer clear of buffets, particularly those abounding with options offering unlimited portions: the bargain for your wallet just isn't worth the health cost for your body. Portion size itself is also consistently associated with greater energy intake and is particularly problematic at all-you-can-eat buffets, though restaurants with large serving sizes lead to similar overconsumption. For many, limiting away from home eating in general is a good idea for this reason. Keep overflowing tables with all kinds of delectable foods—like the cover of my newest book, below—for holidays, not everyday eating.



3

Find Support

Support can take many shapes and forms, and encouragement from spouses, family, and friends is helpful. Finding communities of like-minds is also effective. This is why group meetings are part of so many weight-loss programs—and meetings don't need to happen in person. There is a rich online universe to meet the needs of every personality type, from chat rooms to websites to apps. One study found, for instance, that improving social support led to a healthier diet and greater weight loss after 16 months. The landscape of online programs and apps focused on healthy eating and weight loss is vast, though, and not all are science-based—or effective. Research is emerging but can't keep abreast of this fast-moving field, so find one that has some evidence of working; there are online consumer forums and surveys showing results from the more popular platforms and apps. And if your goal is to eat more sustainably, more humanely, prolong your life through caloric restriction, or the like—there's a community for that, too. There's also a minefield of online communities filled with bogus diet fads: check the science credentials and promise of miracle cures and quackery, use common sense, and avoid those; your health is too important.

4

Monitor Progress

Support is helpful but can only take you so far if you're not tracking progress: self-monitoring is essential. A scale, for example, is an extremely useful tool for weight loss, as well as weight maintenance. There are some who believe that constant weighing can lead to obsessive eating behavior and dieting—and it can, for the small percentage of those predisposed to eating disorders and similar conditions. But, for everyone else, it is a myth unsupported by research. Many studies show that that people who weigh themselves daily, or frequently, lose more weight and are more likely to keep weight off over time. (I don't know how I'd do it without mine. Seriously.) Measuring waist circumference, or how your clothes fit, are additional ways to monitor weight loss. Blood sugar can and should be measured regularly for those with diabetes or pre-diabetes, an instant indicator of how what you're eating affects your health. Self-monitoring some goals is more difficult at home, like lowering blood pressure or LDL cholesterol, but can be achieved with regular follow-up with a health professional.

Don't go it alone: find individuals or a community in-person or online to support your health goals—and stay motivated by tracking your improvement.

There's an app for that.

5

Indulge! (Sometimes)

Food is truly one of life's great pleasures and should be enjoyed, thoroughly. (Who's with me on this?) Forget denial: research shows it doesn't work, leading to cravings and subsequent overeating that undermine progress. On the other hand, studies show that restricting foods during weight loss—restriction, not total denial—will lead to decreased cravings for those same foods over time. The key, of course, is moderation. Moderation is difficult to quantify—when is it okay to indulge, by how much, and how often?—and may look different from person to person. You need to develop "flexible dietary restraint," a wordy concept that rings true. Specifically, each eating occasion is an opportunity to initiate or inhibit, and knowing when to do what requires dietary wisdom. With time and experience, you will achieve that elusive balance of incorporating indulgences into your life without compromising weight, health, and longevity. Self-monitoring (step 4) is imperative.



6 Eat Mindfully

Mindful eating involves bringing attentiveness to physical and emotional sensations connected with dining or being in a food environment. It adapts the concept of mindfulness, a non-judgmental awareness of the present moment. This is a newer research area, but 6 randomized controlled trials showed that mindfulness was associated with weight loss. Another 18 observational studies found that mindfulness programs were helpful for emotional eating, as well as eating disorders. Mindfulness can be learned by considering such questions as "How does this meal smell, and taste? How important is it for me to eat healthfully? What passes through my mind when eating this meal?" (Writing answers down is key.) Meditation and self-compassion are part of some mindful eating programs and have been shown to be particularly helpful for those on a weight loss diet by decreasing negative thoughts associated with dieting. (And mindfulness and meditation have myriad benefits beyond physical health, too.)



7

Keep on Trying & Give It Time

Rome wasn't built in a day, good things come to those who wait, life's a marathon, not a sprint . . . Whatever adage you prefer, the same sentiment holds true for achieving your dietary goals. For one thing, you need to "try, try again" when retraining your palate to prefer healthier foods. Repeated exposures, over time, are the key. (Studies suggest 7-10 tries, not once or twice.) Good health doesn't happen overnight, and some goals take longer to achieve than others. Be patient. There are scores of tools, techniques, and tips spanning the social and behavioral sciences that can support your health journey, many of which are literally at your fingertips. Consulting a behavioral nutritionist or diet counselor or qualified health coach in an individual or group setting can help you develop additional skills to get you—and keep you—on the right track, as will returning to the strategies discussed herein, again and again. Health and wellness is a lifelong journey, and I'm right there with you, every day. Creating and maintaining a health-giving, disease-preventing, longevity-producing, planet-saving diet will have ups and downs, successes and failures. Change is possible, but patience and perseverance are paramount.

Through all things, keep focused, be kind to yourself always, and...





never, never,
never give up

~ Winston Churchill



About the Author

[P.K. Newby, ScD, MPH, MS](#) (“The Nutrition Doctor”) is a scientist, gastronome, and author with twenty-five years’ experience researching diet-related diseases; studying how people make food choices and their impact on the environment; and teaching why what we eat matters, from farm to fork. She is a thought leader who speaks locally, nationally, and internationally, and her newest book is *Food and Nutrition: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford University Press, 2018). Other works include *Superfoods* (National Geographic, 2016); two ebooks on employee health and wellness (Virgin Pulse, 2015); and *Foods for Health: Choose and Use the Very Best Foods for Your Family and Our Planet* (National Geographic, 2014). She also communicates with the public on her blog, *Cooking & Eating the PK Way*. She consults regularly and has served as a science advisor to several companies. Dr. Newby’s passion for nutrition stems from a life-long love affair with food, from cooking, baking, and gardening as a kid to working in the restaurant industry. She was one of the “best undiscovered cooks” on ABC’s *The Taste* (2014-2015) where she created globally inspired, plant-based cuisine based on her “Healthy Hedonism” philosophy—and she was the last woman standing with domestic goddess Nigella Lawson. She holds a doctorate from Harvard, two master’s degrees from Columbia, and served on the faculties at Tufts University (Research Scientist & Assistant Professor) and Boston University (Associate Professor). She’s currently an Adjunct Associate Professor and award-winning educator at Harvard and dedicates most of her time to fighting anti-science in all the ways that she can.





FOOD & NUTRITION

WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW®

P. K. NEWBY, ScD, MPH, MS

Are you sometimes confused about what to eat for health? Do you want science-based information but don't know who or what to believe? Do you feel like nutritionists are always changing their minds? I've got you.

If you answered "yes" to any of these three questions, you're not alone. And it's exactly why I wrote *Food & Nutrition: What Everyone Needs to Know*. (Yup, that means *you*.) The book examines 134 questions addressing "need to know" topics about how what we eat impacts our health and longevity as well as our shared environment and society. Say goodbye to fake nutrition news: *Food & Nutrition* debunks food myths and junk-science that lie at the heart of nutrition confusion. You'll see what scientific evidence shows about popular diets—gluten-free to all-Paleo, GMOs to grass-fed beef, and beyond—while learning the truth about food and nutrition, from farm to fork. And the best part? When it comes to a health-giving, disease-preventing diet, one size doesn't fit all. Nutrition confusion ends here.

Buy the book from [Indiebound](#) or [Amazon](#) or [OUP](#) now!

Get Out of the Goop & Get Your Science On (i.e., selected scientific references)



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