

Staying Healthy into the New Year and Beyond...

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November is officially over, the rain has begun in earnest and the holidays are upon us. With the festive season, comes time spent with friends and family, stress and a common tendency to over eat. There are the upcoming parties & family gatherings, fast food on the road as you frantically drive from one place to the next, followed by the New Year's resolution to improve your diet, relocate your gym membership card and lose the extra pounds put on since October. Thus, on the cusp of the holidays, there is no better time than the present to talk about why we should avoid overindulging and eat healthy well into 2010 and beyond.

What we choose to eat, how much we eat, as well as how we eat has a tremendous impact on our health. We live in a world where quick and processed food is readily available and may satisfy our hunger and cravings but does nothing to fulfill our nutritional needs and has multiple negative consequences on our health. We are experiencing a nation-wide epidemic of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease because of the "what, why, and how" of the standard American diet of fast, easy food. Faced with these overwhelming statistics, it's clear that the way in which we consume food must change.

After the New Year, in an attempt to lose weight, many will turn to one of several fad diets from high protein/low carb to strict calorie counting to plans that provide processed, pre-packaged foods. With these diets the goal is to lose weight quickly and many are initially successful. Unfortunately a majority of those individuals will "fall off" of the diet, experiencing rebound weight gain that is frequently higher than their initial weight. Failure occurs for many

reasons, the most common being the diets are difficult and unrealistic to maintain over the long term and more importantly, the focus is not on changing poor eating habits and lifestyle. In order to make sustainable change, consideration must be placed not only on how much we are eating but also the what, why, and how of consumption. This doesn't mean we start eating food that tastes like cardboard but rather we need to begin taking steps towards making conscious choices. As we begin to slow down,

start cooking our own fresh food and take the time to enjoy it, we will see how tasty whole foods can be and how great we can feel. I know what you're thinking: I don't have time to cook!. But by keeping meals simple and doing some planning ahead, it often

doesn't take much more time than waiting for that take-out meal and the benefits to your health and well-being are

limitless. It's time to get back to the basics of eating:

- Have three moderate meals a day and a couple of snacks that include whole grains, fresh vegetables, fruits, and protein.
- The majority of our food should come from the outer perimeters of the grocery store, farmer's markets, or our own gardens. Avoid what comes in cardboard boxes, cans, and plastic bags.
- Eat meals sitting down at a table. This allows us to relax and eat slower, avoiding the common tendency to overeat while "on the run" and under stress.
- Buy organic and locally whenever possible. These foods have more nutrients without pesticides and chemicals, helping decrease cravings by fulfilling our nutritional needs.
- Consider why you are eating what you are eating. Is it because you are hungry or other reasons like boredom, cravings, or fatigue? If the latter is true, look for alternatives like taking a walk outside, getting more sleep, or reading a book.

So here's to a healthy holiday season and New Year!

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