



Resolutions That Can Really Make a Difference

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Do New Year's resolutions really do any good? It depends on what they are and whether you can keep them. A new study reports that people who follow federal nutrition guidelines closely have a lower than average incidence of cancer. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, released by the federal government and aimed at overall good health, and the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) *Diet and Health Guidelines for Cancer Prevention*, together form an excellent basis for resolutions that can make a real difference in your life. Consider these guidelines goals to work toward; make resolutions about specific behavior changes that will help you reach them.

The first two Dietary Guidelines for Americans are, "Aim for a healthy weight" and "Be physically active each day." These messages are also key points in the AICR guidelines. These goals are included in dietary guidelines because more than half of U.S. adults are now at unhealthy weights that put them at risk of cancer, heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. The federal guideline's use of "aim" means you shouldn't plan to achieve the goal overnight, but change behaviors gradually over time. To "maintain" a healthy weight is not to drop weight on a fad diet and regain it, which is typical, but permanently change eating and lifestyle habits to reach and stay at a healthy weight.

To get there, AICR emphasizes the importance of portion sizes appropriate to your body's real needs. That means considering a resolution to avoid supersized portions. AICR's "New American Plate" approach to eating emphasizes that besides

portion control, healthy eating also means a balanced, mostly plant-based diet in which grains (preferably whole grains), vegetables and fruits make up two-thirds (or more) of our plates and animal protein one-third (or less). A recent report in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* emphasizes that eating only low-fat foods is not the key to weight control; balanced eating, with plenty of high-fiber foods, is also important.

Both sets of dietary guidelines talk about the importance of being active every day. AICR encourages accumulating an hour of moderate activity each day, and an hour of vigorous activity sometime each week. You can make these goals achievable by breaking up active time into 10- or 15-minute blocks at lunchtime and before and after work. Or make activity a fun part of your day by setting walking goals using a pedometer, or finding co-workers who enjoy a sport or activity that you can share.

Both sets of guidelines also emphasize making whole grains, vegetables and fruits the main focus of our meals. Eating plenty of fruits and vegetables is not just important for weight control. Meeting the minimum goal of five servings a day could lower cancer risk up to 20 percent, and provide other health benefits, too. Consider a resolution to include a fruit or vegetable (or both!) at lunch each day, to have fruit for a snack or dessert at least once daily. Change the proportion of your main course. One tactic is to prepare combination dishes, like stews and stir-fries, with less meat and more vegetables. Try switching from refined breads or cereals to whole-grain products.

Moderation in alcohol (no more than one standard drink daily for women, or no more than two for men) is part of both guidelines, too. Try switching to sparkling water or cider, or a tangy tomato juice. Guidelines to avoid foods high in fat and salt offer

plenty of other opportunities to make resolutions that will improve the quality of your eating. Perhaps the best start might be a resolution to stop taking your health for granted.

If you need help to improve your eating habits and prevent weight gain, *Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!*[™] can help. Contact your local Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) or Dietitian for more information.