***Tips on Eating Healthfully in the Winter***

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Have you found a little extra padding around your middle lately? You are not alone!

Many people find that wintertime eating is tricky when it comes to maintaining weight. This is due to many factors, including the types of food available, the need for “comfort food” in the dark winter months, and the availability of traditional wintertime favorites. The holidays, and their fattening menu have just passed, New Year’s resolutions are almost forgotten, and we are back to our old habits.

Here are a few tips that may help you reach the warmer days of spring, with your waistline intact:

**Water.** Instead of pop or sweetened drinks, substitute water. The dry winter air tends to dehydrate us, and what we mistake for hunger is often just thirst. Drinking a glass of water *before you eat* will hydrate you, help curb your appetite, and aid digestion. As an alternative, skim milk is mostly water, but also contains a good amount of calcium and vitamin D. (Vitamin D helps with seasonal depression, which many people encounter during the winter.)

**Fruits and vegetables.** A good rule of thumb is to make certain half your plate is fruits and vegetables. Try to pass up anything with fat or sugar added, such as fruit compote or au gratin potatoes. Fresh fruit and steamed vegetables are your best bet. Eat your vegetables and fruit before you eat your main course, so that you acquire the nutrients you need and do not overdo it with the more highly caloric entrée. (No, French fries and potato chips do not count as vegetables!)

**Lean meats.** Given a choice between a hot dog, cheeseburger, or a chicken breast, choose the chicken breast more often. It is lower in fat, and fat does tend to end up around your middle during the months you are not exercising as much.

**Whole grains.** Choose whole wheat or whole grain products instead of white bread. The fiber in a true whole grain product is better for your heart and digestion. In addition, whole grain products contain more nutrients. If you read the label on a whole grain product, it should list at least three grams per serving.

**Unprocessed food.** Try to avoid quick fix solutions, like cereal bars, protein bars, and other foods in prepackaged containers. Whole foods are better and have fewer additives. If you are going shopping at the grocery store, the unprocessed whole foods are usually the ones you will find if you walk around the perimeter of the store. They include dairy, eggs, meat, produce, and more.

**Eat just half.** It is okay to eat only half of the food on your plate, or just use a smaller plate. Do not let your conscience guilt you into retaining your membership in the Clean Plate Club. Your mom is not looking over your shoulder.

**Sample the fattening choices.** Yes, it is okay to do this. Just limit it to a spoonful or two, so you don’t feel as if you have deprived yourself.

**Junk food.** Do not even think about it! Keep away from the bags of chips, cookies, popcorn, and other temptations. This is a good time to “just say no.” If you need something to munch on, go for the carrots, almonds, apples, bananas, and other easily tote-able foods.

**Dessert.** Save dessert for one day per week. This will take some doing, especially when in certain environments. Alternatively, make fruit your dessert daily. It really just takes a different mindset, and fruit can be a delicious end of the meal.

***For more information on eating healthfully in the winter, visit these Web sites:***

**WebMd:**<http://www.webmd.com/diet/features/control-your-winter-appetite#1>

**WebMd Food Calculator:**<http://www.webmd.com/diet/food-fitness-planner/default.htm>

**CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention):**<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy_eating/index.html>

**United States Department of Agriculture:**<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/>

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