

Learn the ‘tricks of the substitution trade’ for eating healthier

So, you can take control of your eating, when things around you may feel out of control



With the ongoing global pandemic, it might feel like some (many?) things are out of your control. The good news is, there are still plenty of things you can control, and if, like many people, you made a New Year’s resolution to eat healthier, here’s some more good news!

With the “tricks of the substitution trade,” you can eat healthier and still enjoy most of the textures and tastes you desire, while better managing your weight and nutritional wellness. The trick is swapping ingredients and foods high in sugar, sodium, saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol for more nutrient-rich counterparts that offer nearly the same flavors and consistencies.

A “healthy eating” plan¹ stays within your daily calorie needs, while emphasizing fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products. It also includes a variety of protein foods such as seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes (beans and peas), soy products, nuts and seeds, and is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium) and added sugars.

With that in mind, consider the tips below to help you get started making satisfyingly healthier choices.

Note:

These are based on general health needs. Consult with a physician or professional dietician for guidance specific to your individual needs.

Enriching recipes

Most of the time, you can make trades in whatever you’re cooking without noticeably changing the taste or texture. The Internet is full of advice from healthcare organizations and recipe sites, but here are a few commonly cited ones:

- For recipes, replace 1 cup of whole milk with 1 cup of fat-free or low-fat milk plus 1 tablespoon of liquid vegetable oil. For 1 cup of heavy cream, use 1 cup of evaporated skim milk or 1/2 low-fat yogurt and 1/2 cup plain low-fat unsalted cottage cheese.
- In baked goods, for 1 cup of vegetable oil, use 1 cup of unsweetened applesauce, ripe and mashed banana, or unseasoned, cooked and pureed cauliflower, pumpkin or zucchini. Likewise, instead of 1 ounce of unsweetened baking chocolate, use 3 tablespoons of unsweetened cocoa powder.

Enriching recipes (continued)

- If you're making something that calls for mayonnaise, cream cheese or sour cream, use their low-fat, low-calorie counterparts. You can also lose the fat and gain some protein by cutting the called-for ratio with non-fat plain Greek yogurt.
- For meaty stews, soups or chilis, use a leaner cut of meat and/or replace half the meat with vegetables.
- Cut the sugar and salt in recipes and in your general use. Sooner than you might believe, your tastebuds will adjust and get the same satisfaction as before.

Taking out while eating out

Even when you're eating out you can take control of what you're taking in. While these ideas won't provide the same taste-to-texture ratio, they will help you stay on track.

The classic ploys involve skipping the deep-fried fries and getting steamed vegetables instead, asking for dressings on the side, and navigating the menu to find the most nutritious options.

Even in those hard-to-negotiate-with-yourself times of intense craving or when you're at a restaurant that specializes in that certain special item, you can still take actions to stay closer to the health track. One strategy is to trick yourself by ordering the healthier sidekick to quell the crave. For example:

- Can't wait to crunch on those salty French fries dipped in ketchup? Get a baked potato instead and still dip it in ketchup for flavor.
- Hankering for your favorite creamy soup? Get its broth-based cousin instead.
- Staring down the batter-fried chicken sandwich with all the fixings? Keep the fixings and get grilled chicken.
- Go for the vinaigrette (olive oil and vinegar with seasonings) over the high fat, high sugar, high sodium Thousand Island or French dressing.

You also can remove items to bring down the fat, sodium and sugar. For example, a burger is still a burger if it's dressed up with guacamole, tomato, lettuce and raw onion instead of cheese, mayonnaise, bacon and grilled onions.

Another stealthy move is to deploy classic portion control. Meaning, order the mouthwatering meal of your dreams, but ask the server to only bring you half of the portion and pack the other half to-go. Or, split the entree with a companion.

Texture-driven trades

Sometimes what you're really looking for is a certain special feel of a food. Focus on the texture to satiate the craving. For example, for:

- Creamy, try fresh avocado, warmed peanut butter or a glass of low-fat milk.
- Crunchy, try unsalted nuts, whole grain cereal, popcorn seasoned with your favorite spice or herb.
- Squishy, try frozen fresh grapes, string cheese or fat-free tapioca pudding.
- Crispy, many varieties of apples (like Braeburn, Honey Crisp, Fuji or Gala) will have your back.
- Chewy, try dried fruits like apricots and figs.
- Sweet, try dark chocolate or fresh or frozen fruit.
- Salty, try olives, dill pickles or lightly salted popcorn or nuts.

Censoring yourself

It's well-known that you should avoid grocery shopping when you're hungry, because you'll tend to buy more high-calorie foods. You'll also be more apt to make impulse purchases. But a slew of other ways is at the ready to help you stop yourself before you start, including:

- Replace junk food with healthy snacks – such as unsalted nuts, cut up raw vegetables, fresh fruit, etc. – by not buying junk food in the first place. So, when snack time strikes or hunger calls, you'll satiate yourself with what you have on hand.

Censoring yourself (continued)

- Outsmart yourself by using smaller dishes, preserving your portion and keeping the extras out of reach. Your brain will see a full plate of food, and you'll be less likely to overindulge because the portion will be smaller and reaching for seconds will be inconvenient.
- Trade self-imposed "all or nothing" food restrictions with snacks and smaller meals more often.
- Eat breakfast and have some healthy snacks during the day. Skipping breakfast and letting yourself get extra hungry during the day often will set you up for binge eating later. It also sends your metabolism on an inefficient yo-yo journey.

Use the trigger switch for feeling fuller

Take advantage of nourishing foods that make you feel fuller to trick yourself into eating fewer calories overall.

- Some fats – namely monounsaturated and polyunsaturated ones – are good for you, especially your brain and heart. You can find these in olive oil, nuts, seeds, certain types of fish, and avocados. These kinds of fats also help you feel satiated and fuller.
- So does fiber, which also helps control blood sugar and lowers cholesterol levels. Get more from fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans and peas.

Using this tactic, you can eat smaller portions of the foods you love, and accompany them with the above to get that well-fed feeling. Happy New Year!

Additional resources

If something you love is not in this list, a quick Internet search will yield even more ideas. Simply type in "healthy substitutions for (your desired food)" and you'll get some options for more nutritious replacements.

Sources:

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