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START THE NEW YEAR WITH A HEALTHY FOOD ENVIRONMENT

The slate is clean. The New Year has begun, and millions of Americans are making promises to themselves to improve their lives. Common resolutions are to lose weight and start exercising. A trip to the gym finds a full parking lot. A trip down the supermarket aisle and you will discover plenty of “diet” foods on sale.

This year take a different approach and vow to have a healthier food environment. Instead of measuring yourself by the scale, or if your pants are too tight, make health your goal. The recent debate over health care reform is an excellent reminder. If you are in good health, then you are less likely to need expensive medical procedures.

My challenge to you is make an appointment with your health care provider and get a checkup. Find out if your lab values are in normal range. You may need to make changes to improve your good cholesterol (HDL), lower your blood pressure, or decrease your blood sugar. Focus on ONE positive health behavior and stock your pantry so it will be easier to pick the best foods.

Too often we focus on what to eliminate, when instead the approach should be positive – what can I add to my diet to make it healthier.

Here are 12 simple tips to get you started. You can adapt one each month to make gradual changes to healthier eating.

1. Choose nutrient rich beverages like low-fat dairy products and 100% fruit juice.
2. Shop for snacks that are partially or 100% whole grain products like popcorn, tortilla chips, and Sun chips.
3. Store the salt shaker in the cabinet. Experiment with a variety of herbs and seasonings.
4. Eat vegetarian one night a week.
5. Replace white bread with the new white whole grain breads.
6. Keep dried, frozen, and canned fruit in your pantry for when you run out of fresh fruit.
7. Try a new vegetable.

8. Eat beans. Possible choices are baked beans, black beans, black-eyed peas, chick peas, legumes, lima beans, navy beans, and pinto beans.
9. Buy smaller plates, bowls, and beverage containers. You'll consume fewer calories without even noticing.
10. Never skip breakfast. Keep healthy breakfast foods on hand, since it's the most important meal of the day.
11. Experiment with new recipes. Food has to be eaten to be nutritious and that means it needs to taste good.
12. Make family meals a priority.

Our food environment really does affect what and how much we eat. The book, *Mindless Eating – Why we eat more than we think*, by psychologist and Professor of Consumer Behavior at Cornell University, Brian Wansink, reveals the hidden dynamics behind our dietary habits. It is a must read for anyone who is serious about changing how they eat and the book I most commonly recommend. The Frederick County library offers the book and sound recording. Go to <http://www.fcpl.org/index.php> to put a copy on hold and find out which location is closest to you.

For the person who wants a quick tutorial then visit www.mindlesseating.org and take the mindless quiz or www.smallplatemovement.org and watch the videos clips. They are fascinating and will motivate you to make more mindful, enjoyable, and healthy choices at the dinner table, in the supermarket, at the office, and even at a vending machine.

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