BATTING OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY: WHAT WORKS?

Many people resolve each New Year to lose weight and get in shape. Yet, losing weight and keeping it off can be more difficult in an environment that sabotages your efforts. Recognizing the pitfalls and effectively dealing with them can mean a leaner, healthier you.

It is important to appreciate that you are a marketing target. Competition within the food industry is keen and gaining your food dollar is the goal. Manufacturers and retailers will undertake every effort to make food cheaper, tastier, and more convenient in order to gain your commitment to their product.

Oftentimes, these efforts are not in your health’s best interest. Junk food is much more appealing than raw veggies and dip and are, therefore, easier to sell. It is not surprising, then, to see an abundance of foods high in fat, calories, cholesterol, and/or sodium competing for your dollar.

Convenience foods usually save you time at the expense of your nutrition. Heat and eat skillet/oven dinners, frozen entrees, and boxed meal kits (add only the meat) will get a meal on the table quickly but it will be a meal high in sodium and/or fat.

Food is also made more convenient by being just about everywhere. Whether shopping at the mall or filling your gas tank, food is for sale. Vending machines filled with soda and snack foods can be found in schools and even grocery stores. Drive-in windows and delivery service provide food without you having to leave your car or home, respectively.

The concept of food as a dollar value is unique to the United States. Most world cultures do not view food in this way. Rather, food is considered something that enhances the day, brings people together, and nourishes the body. In Japan, the dietary guidelines state, “Happy eating makes for happy family life; sit down and eat together and talk; treasure family taste and home cooking.”

“Meal deals”, “two for’s”, and super-sizing are not commonly found anywhere but in the U.S. In our society, where two out of three adults are overweight or obese, perhaps consumers should evaluate if “more for less” is necessarily a good thing.

How can a person eat healthfully when continually tempted and encouraged to indulge in unhealthful foods? Consider the following strategies:
• Always pay attention to portion size. When served more, you eat more—and you probably are not aware of it. Divide restaurant portions in halves or thirds; share your dish with a friend or take home the additional food for a future meal. Order an appetizer, salad, or side dish instead of a main entrée.

• It takes 20-30 minutes of eating before hormones that regulate satiety are secreted. Eating slowly allows fewer calories to be taken in before a feeling of fullness kicks in. Sipping water between bites, cutting your food into small pieces, and conversing while dining all slow your pace of eating.

• Recognize what motivates you to eat. When food is abundant, most choose to eat based on appetite (a psychological drive to eat) not hunger (a physiological drive to eat). Appetite is stimulated when confronted with food that looks, smells, and tastes good; memories of good tasting food and pleasant feelings will also heighten appetite. When you eat to combat boredom, anxiety, or sadness, you are eating for comfort, not hunger.

• Count liquid calories. A 12-ounce regular soda can have 200 calories and offers no nutrition. Choose a 20-, 32-, or 64-ounce soda now available and you can easily add many empty calories to your diet without trying. Select diet soda, seltzer or club soda with fruit juice added instead. Better yet, opt for skim, low-fat milk, or 100% fruit juice with your meals. You may take in fewer calories and get needed vitamins and minerals as well.

• Variety in the diet is important, provided you get your variety in foods that benefit your health. Foods such as fruits and vegetables, soups, and salads should be offered in great variety. The opposite is true of fast food, desserts, and snack foods. The reason? Studies show that when offered more variety, people consume more food. Better to consume a variety of foods low in calories but high in nutrients than to load up on calories, fat, cholesterol, and sodium.

• Exercise—preferably every day. Those who have lost weight 30 pounds or more and kept it off for at least a year, incorporate exercise into most of their days. Finding several calorie-burning activities that you enjoy will help stave off boredom and keep you moving.

These recipes offer good nutrition and great taste. They can easily be part of a weight management program that satisfies tastebuds and waistlines.

**SESAME SCALLOP STIR-FRY**

2 tablespoons sesame oil  
2 garlic cloves, minced  
1 teaspoon crushed red pepper  
1 pound bay scallops*  
2 tablespoons sesame seeds  
1 tablespoon ground ginger  
1 head bok choy (Chinese white cabbage, about 3 lbs), trimmed and chopped  
1 package (16 ounces) frozen stir-fry vegetables, thawed and drained  
1 tablespoon light soy sauce
Heat the sesame oil in a wok or large skillet over high heat. Add garlic, crushed red pepper, and scallops and sauté until the scallops are cooked through. With a slotted spoon, remove the scallops to a bowl and cover to keep warm. Add the sesame seeds and ginger to the wok and cook for 1 to 2 minutes, or until the liquid is absorbed. Add the bok choy and the stir-fry vegetables and stir-fry for 4 to 5 minutes. Return the scallops to the wok and add the soy sauce. Stir-fry for 1 to 2 minutes or until heated through. Serve immediately. Serves 8 (1 cup serving).

*Shrimp may be substituted for scallops.

**CHICKEN AND PEPPER TRIO**  
Serves 6  
1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breast, cut into ½-inch strips  
3/4 cup low-fat Italian dressing, divided use  
1 package (16 ounces) frozen bell pepper strips (green, red, yellow mix)  
1 package (10 ounces) fresh spinach, washed and trimmed

Place the chicken in an 8-inch square baking dish and add 1/2 cup Italian dressing; mix well. Cover and marinate in the refrigerator for 1-2 hours. Heat a large nonstick skillet over high heat until hot. Add the chicken to the pan, discarding the marinade, and cook 2-3 minutes per side or until no pink remains. Remove the chicken from the pan; set aside. Add peppers to the pan and cook briefly until crisp-tender, stirring occasionally. Return the chicken to the pan and cook until heated through. Place the spinach in a large bowl and add the chicken mixture and remaining ¼ cup Italian dressing; toss well. Serve immediately.

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