How to Improve Your Diet: An Action Plan

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Over the years, I've seen people have long-term success with dietary changes in a number of ways. Some make a complete dietary overhaul at once, others make small steps and change one thing at time to build confidence, with others take a variety of approaches (strict at first and gradually moving to a more mindful way of eating). Below are 4 steps I like to use to encourage lasting behavior change.

1) The reality check: Taking an honest look at what you're eating and drinking is a good first step. Some people choose to use a food and calorie tracker app, others write down what they eat, some take photos of their meals and others just decide to pay more attention to what they consume. It can be an informative exercise to do this for a few days to help identify your unique food patterns and see if there are any diet habits you've created that you'd like to change. Note your moods - do you eat for emotional reasons? You don't need to know how many calories and grams of protein you eat, but having a general sense of what you're eating, how much and why is an important first step for most. Thinking about what you learned, write one steps you'd like to take to improve your current diet.

My action step:_____

2) Search the evidence: Take a look at our nutrition research document and see if there is anything you can learn from some of these studies. Or do a quick review of nutrition studies and see if there's anything new you can personally benefit from.

3) Make a tiny goal for the month & determine your "why": Write (or type) your goal and be as specific as possible. Instead of, *I want to lose weight*, try, *I want to lose 2-3# in one month. I will replace my daily 3 pm pastry with a piece of fresh fruit.* Or, *I will bring my water bottle to work daily and aim to finish it by the end of my work day.* You get the idea - make your goals practical and specific and you may want to set just 1-2 goals at a time. Then as you achieve those, perhaps add another.

Think about the reason you want to change (*to keep up with my grandkids, to reduce my blood pressure medication, to be a healthy role model for my patients*). Having a diet change attached to a larger meaning is usually helpful for behavior change

My goal & my 'why':

_____

_____

4) Create a supportive physical environment: So much of what we eat is influenced by our environment. If we go to a restaurant and are served a 1,300 calorie quesadilla, chances are we'll finish it. We generally tend to eat what's in front of us - regardless of whether we're satisfied or not. Using smaller plates is a quick trick to eat smaller amounts.

Check out your working environment: Do you have a jar of candy sitting on your desk? Soda in your work fridge? A hospital vending machine with your favorite candy bar? Look at what things in your work environment are not supportive of your goal. How can you build an environment that's supportive? Maybe bring a bag of apples to work each Monday? Maybe keep raw almonds in your office for when you get hungry? Set a new example by keeping only healthy snacks on your desk? (See related document, How to Make Your Worksite Healthier)

My healthy work environment plan: _____