

Health

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Create an environment that encourages healthy eating

Did you know that your kitchen can convey a mood to you that will either make you feel hungry and sabotage your efforts to lose weight, or encourage you to maintain healthy eating habits? For example: Do you have a pantry full of snacks? Bread sitting on the kitchen counter? Candy in bowls for the kids or visitors? Large dinner plates that overflow with extra helpings of everything on the table? If so, you're making it very difficult for your brain to make rational, self-controlled choices about healthy eating.

In order to make healthy choices, we have to put ourselves in an environment that encourages us to do that. And sometimes keeping our choices to a minimum can add a little bit more help to get us past a challenge while we work on developing healthier habits. Here are some suggestions about how to create an environment that will help you achieve your wellness goals.

In the kitchen

The "ready to grab" foods that you keep on the counter will most often end up in your mouth. Hide the candy in the cupboard and set out a bowl of fresh fruit. In your refrigerator, bring the produce to the front where you can see it and put leftovers in the freezer for future use. Stock your refrigerator with small bags of crunchy, easily available foods such as cut-up carrots, celery, jicama, radishes, green or red peppers, apples, oranges and grapes.

On the table

In the old days, a good meal had each of the four quadrants of the plate full with something from each food group: vegetable, potato, meat and salad. You don't have to do that - and, in fact, it doesn't help keep the family trim and healthy. Instead, have just a few options: a main course and one or two vegetable side dishes. And instead of large serving bowls, put only enough in a bowl or on the plate to provide each person with a reasonable helping. Package the extras in the kitchen before you serve the meal to cut down on eating second and third helpings.

On the plate

The newest approach to helping people cut down on the amount of food they eat is to use a 9-inch plate rather than the standard 12-inch. The larger the plate, the more you will tend to eat because it looks like you don't have enough on the larger plate. Think small when selecting plates, bowls, cups and glasses. When learning how to judge portion sizes to eat less, you must retrain your eyes as well as your stomach if you want to lose weight.

In the pantry

A lot of people like to buy in bulk because it's less expensive. The problem is that when the large container is opened, you might be encouraged to overeat because you feel "I don't want to waste my money and have leftovers spoil or go uneaten." Therefore, maybe a smaller container would be more practical - there's less to waste, less to spoil, less to tempt you. Or invest in a vacuum sealer for food and when you open the large container, prepare small bags of the food that can be frozen. Remember, when food is around, you'll eat it "because it's there." Also, if you keep treats on hand, limit yourself to a small supply - not the super family-size packs.

Help yourself achieve your goals by creating a "user-friendly home." Identify the situations that create challenges for you and make life a whole lot easier by developing a creative plan to change them.