

Health

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Enjoy food more, and lose weight, the French way

News reports say that the French know how to eat well, and still keep slim and healthy. How do they do it? Here are some tips to help you stay healthy the French way.

Portion control. French portions are much smaller than those served in the United States. For example, one study which compared food found in Philadelphia with French food indicates that an American soft drink is 52 percent larger than one in France, a hot dog is 63 percent larger and a carton of yogurt is 82 percent larger.

Think quality, not quantity. The French appear to enjoy food more than we do. Americans tend to confuse enjoying food with over-consumption. As a result, only 39 percent of Americans say they greatly enjoy eating, compared to 90 percent of people in France.

Eat slowly. The French tend to eat their food more slowly and to enjoy the experience of eating more than Americans. Parisians who eat at McDonald's spend an average of 22 minutes eating, while Americans are in and out in an average of 14 minutes. We "speed-eat" in this country, just as we rush through everything else. The problem is that when we eat fast we tend to eat more. Since it takes about 15 minutes for your stomach to understand that it is full, eating slowly means that you'll be more likely to stop when you are "satisfied" as opposed to being "full".

Eat real food. French food is fresh and "unprocessed." They tend to eat full-fat cheese and yogurt, butter, bread, fresh fruits and vegetables, small portions of meat (with less red meat), wine and dark chocolate. When food is fresh, without chemicals and preservatives, it will taste better and you'll be more satisfied with less food.

Make meals a priority. The French eat meals at a table as a family. American families who eat dinner together tend to eat more vegetables and fruits, and less fried foods, soda and foods containing trans fats than those who rarely or never dine together, studies show. Talking with family members keeps your mouth busy instead of eating, which allows you time to realize you're full. Set a regular time for dinner and turn off the TV and the computer. If you're dining alone, read a good book or listen to quiet music to help you relax and slow down while you eat.

Plan on seconds. Don't eat all your food at once. The French eat in courses, one at a time (appetizer, entrée, salad, dessert). They know that another course is coming so they can eat less at each course. Serve yourself an amount that looks like "not quite enough", and plan to go back for seconds without guilt.

Do what you love. An American study found that people who exercised to lose weight or tone up spent about 40 percent less time exercising than those who exercised for reasons beyond dropping pounds, such as reducing stress, spending time with friends or increasing their well-being. Do what you love - whether it's tennis, dancing, biking, or walking, and you'll reap the rewards of a strong body and healthy heart.

Have a sweet indulgence. The French diet leaves room for sweet indulgences like full-fat cheese and rich, dark chocolate. Take a very small amount, the size of your thumb, perhaps, and eat it slowly, drawing out the experience as long as you can. Completing your meals with an “ender” helps cut cravings, so you have no need for snacks.

Snack smart. The French diet is low on snacks. When they do snack between meals, people in France tend to choose bread, cheese, yogurt and fresh fruit as opposed to cakes or candies, one study finds. When cravings strike between meals, remember to choose only fresh, real foods (such as fruit and cheese) - they're often just as convenient as highly processed products. And eat your snack slowly and mindfully, free of guilt.
