

10 Habits Which Will Improve Your Life

With the amount of money Americans spend on the latest fad diets, pills and supplements (which exceeds billions each year), why are we as a population



unhealthier than ever? In an age where extreme fads predominate and common sense seems to be lacking, I am here to propose 10 sensible habits which can truly improve your life. Now, don't read this article and proceed to walk away

taking all 10 steps on board at once. Instead, choose one to start off with and stick with it until it becomes a habitual part of your life. Then, add another and then another and so forth until all 10 are integrated into your life.



Let's begin:

1. **Avoid refined grains:** When grains are refined, the fiber, protein, essential fatty acids, plus dozens of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and phytochemicals are removed in the bran and germ. By law, only four synthetically produced nutrients are re-



added to refined flour. Eating whole grains as part of your diet helps modulate blood sugar, reduces the risk of diabetes, helps maintain a healthy body weight, reduces risk of cardiovascular disease, and so much more. Additionally, whole grains (complex sugars) are what the good bacteria in our intestines need to feed on and thrive. Bad bacteria in our intestines thrive off simple sugars (refined grains and added sugar). Choosing whole grains over refined grains therefore benefits the bacterial flora in your intestines by strengthening the good bacterial colony and compromising the bad which protects your health. So, choose only whole grains whenever possible: 100% whole grain breads, whole grain pasta,

brown rice, whole grain crackers, etc. Be cautious when choosing products, check the ingredient panel. Just because the label says 'wholegrain' or 'multi-grain' does not always mean that it is %100 wholegrain. Ensure the first ingredient is always wholegrain.

2. **Reduce saturated and trans fat:** This recommendation is likely well-known to all, but let's begin to take it seriously. Saturated fat contributes to increased cholesterol levels and increases risk of cardiovascular disease. Choose non-fat dairy products, cut all visible fat off meat before cooking, replace butter with a healthy margarine spread, or low fat milk and or better yet use natural vitamin E-packed avocado as a spread. Even worse than saturated fat is trans fat. Saturated fat increases both types of cholesterol: LDL (bad) and HDL (good). Trans fat, on the other hand, increase LDL and reduces HDL which is detrimental to the HDL/LDL ratio. This is the proportion of good cholesterol to bad cholesterol which is often times a more indicative measure of cardiovascular health than total cholesterol alone. In other words, HDL cholesterol removes plaques from your arteries and LDL cholesterol deposits plaques in your arteries. So, it is the proportion of good cholesterol to bad cholesterol which influences cardiovascular health. Trans fats are found naturally occurring in small amounts in some animal fats but are found mainly in processed foods which contain partially hydrogenated vegetable fats or shortening. So, check ingredient panels and avoid foods which contain these ingredients.



3. **Cut back on sodium:** Although sodium is vital in small amounts, let's face it: we consume way too much of it. The recommendation is no more than 2,300mg/day (1 teaspoon of table salt) but an even lower 1,300mg/day if you suffer from hypertension or kidney disease. The average American consumes 3,375mg/day! A high intake of sodium results in fluid retention, increased risk of hypertension, and in turn an increased risk of cardiovascular and kidney disease. Cut back on processed foods, canned soups, condiments such as soy sauce and Worcester sauce, or choose reduced sodium varieties. Reduce the amount of salt you add during cooking and keep the salt-shaker off the dinner table. Also, make sure the salt you do use is iodized.



4. **Eat only at a table:** This habit is aimed to avoid mindless eating. We need to focus not only on what we eat but also how much. Eating in front of the tv, computer screen, at a desk, or behind a book, etc. equates to us losing track of portion sizes. Also, the foods we generally tend to eat during these activities are calorie dense, high in fat and sodium, non-nutritious and straight out of an oversized pack. Another good rule: don't eat standing up. Picking at leftovers while cleaning up after meals, tastes here and there while cooking, a bite of this and a taste of that: these calories add up! You'd be surprised, this one small change can go a long way and your figure will thank you.



5. **Avoid Nitrites:** What are they? These are preservatives which are commonly found in processed meats such as salami, hot dogs, ham, bacon, etc. in order to retain the meats' pinkish color and prevent the growth of microbes. However, in the acidic environment of your stomach, nitrites react with secondary amines and convert to nitrosamines. Nitrosamines act directly on the DNA of your cells causing mutations; in other words they are carcinogenic. This can ultimately increase your risk of developing cancer. Additionally, nitrite containing foods are often very high in sodium. There is much debate over the safety of these compounds and it is suggested that we do not consume nitrites in doses large enough to be harmful; but why risk it? Let's be safe and avoid them wherever possible. Choose bacon free of nitrites, instead of cured lunch meats make sandwiches with leftover meat, canned fish or chicken, boiled eggs etc. If/when you do eat processed meats, have them alongside foods which contain vitamin C such as a splash of orange juice in your water, tomato slices or spinach on your sandwich, a piece of fruit, etc. Vitamin C inhibits the conversion of sodium nitrite to nitrosamine.

6. **Move more:** Everyday, move more. Aim for at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. There are many ways to get this much activity into your day. Don't be discouraged, 60 minutes does not have to be done in one stint. Wake up 10 minutes early and go for a walk or do some stretching, do some speed-cleaning for 30 minutes around the house, take the stairs instead of the elevator, park your car on the opposite side of the parking lot. Anything counts. Just get moving.



7. **Ditch the 'all or nothing' mentality:** Often, we find ourselves on some strict diet or another only to find ourselves hungry and unsatisfied. This often leads to a very harmful starve-binge cycle. Our diet is going great, or so we think, until a M&M makes its way into our mouth. After this we tend to think, 'I've blown my diet so might as well make the most of it' and we binge the rest of the day promising to get back on our diet the next day. What we need is balance. Eat healthy as often as possible but don't neglect cravings. If you want a treat, have it. Just do so moderately. Let's face it, no fad can last for life so let's focus on a healthy, sensible and moderate lifestyle.

8. **Increase Omega-3's:** Omega-3's are essential fatty acids (meaning our body can't synthesize them and so we need to obtain them from our diet).

They improve cardiovascular inflammation, and healthy brain and Omega-3 fatty acids



biomarkers for disease, reduce play a role in eye function. are found in fish as

well as walnuts, flax seeds, olive oil, pumpkin seeds and soy beans. Alpha linoleic acid (ALA) is the form of omega-3 found in plant sources. DHA and EPA are the forms found in fish. ALA can be converted to DHA and EPA but this conversion in the human body is limited so it is recommended that we eat two to three 6oz. servings of fish each week. If this goal is unattainable, look for a supplement. If you choose to take supplements, ensure the product is free of heavy metals such as lead and mercury and free of pesticide residues. Also, consult your physician if you are on blood thinning or diabetes medications.

9. **Monitor portion sizes:** What is an ideal portion size?

As a general rule of thumb, for each meal your meat or



protein source should be the size of your palm (hand minus fingers). Your carbohydrate/starch should be the size of your hand fisted. Your non-starchy vegetable serving should be your 2 hands cupped together. This great rule is customized for each individual depending on their body size.

10. **Limit the calories you drink:** Regularly drinking beverages such as soda, juice, sweetened coffee drinks, alcohol, etc. are generally energy dense and nutrient poor. They contribute a significant amount of calories to your diet but are not filling and we don't compensate for these extra calories by reducing the amount of calories we eat. Even worse, sugary



drinks cause a surge in your blood sugar which then triggers a surge of insulin to clear the sugar. The high insulin concentration often overcompensates and clears

too much sugar from the blood leaving you feeling sluggish and hungry. If you aren't a fan of plain drinking water, add just a splash of juice or some lime to a big glass of water. Don't add sugar to hot drinks, and if you do try and use sugar substitutes. The exception to this rule, I would say however, is low fat milk and vegetable juices (choose low sodium) which are nutrient-packed and comparatively lower in sugar. But drink these in moderation.

So, let's get started! Choose one to begin with, eventually master all 10, and soon you will be a happier, healthier you!

Live Healthy!

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