Making a fresh start

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Many people start the New Year with resolutions to lose excess body fat. This often leads them to search for some magic bullet supplement to help with fat loss, or to embark on whatever might be the latest food-restriction fad.

Although the intention is good, usually this approach produces little or no loss of body fat. If it does produce some fat loss, it is usually regaining. This almost invariably results in a regain of weight, and the gain is usually larger than the loss!

This approach consistently fails because it focuses on quantity, not quality, of food consumed, and fails to effect a permanent change in food choices and activity habits that cause accumulation of excess fat. This year, try a fresh approach. Instead of focusing on restricting the quantity of food you consume, focus on improving the quality of the foods you eat. Most people will lose much of their excess body fat simply by taking this step toward better health. Here are some suggestions:

1. Stop eating processed vegetable oils, hydrogenated oils, margarine, and shortening.

Substitute extra-virgin olive oil, unrefined coconut butter/oil, ghee (clarified butter), and butter, and use them in moderation. Processed fats and oils, including refined and most polyunsaturated oils, are unwholesome promoters of heart disease, cancer, obesity, and diabetes. In contrast, the natural fats and oils (above) have nourished humans for millennia, and there is no evidence that they are harmful when used in moderation.

2. Remove refined white-flour products and white rice from your diet.

Replace them with 100 percent whole-grain products that have been soaked, sprouted, or naturally fermented. Replace spongy white wallpaper-paste “bread” with 100 percent wholegrain breads produced without yeast, using traditional desem or sourdough methods. The label should contain only grain, water, and sea salt. Dimpflmeier, French Meadows, and Food For Life are examples of three brands of this style of bread, sold in natural foods stores and the freezer section of some supermarkets.

Replace cold cereals with non-instant oatmeal, which is less refined, richer in soluble fiber, and better at controlling your appetite, blood sugar, and energy levels than are cold cereals. For the cost of one box of cold cereal, you can buy enough rolled or steel-cut oats to make thirty or forty large bowls of oatmeal! Better yet, replace bread, pasta, and rice with a wide assortment of colorful fresh vegetables and fruits, which have a higher nutrient and lower calorie density, so you will take in more vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants and be able to eat more for fewer calories!

3. Eat a protein- and produce-rich breakfast every day.

Numerous studies have confirmed the importance of a nourishing breakfast, linking it to lower cholesterol and body fat levels, increased attention span, better blood sugar control, and longevity. Others have shown that it’s almost impossible to lose weight if you eat a large meal at the end of the day, even if you eat nothing the rest of the day! What you eat also counts. Protein and healthy fats and oils (from free-range eggs, nuts, olive or coconut oil, or butter), and the fiber-rich fresh vegetables and fruits provide greater satiety and insulin control than high-carbohydrate, low-protein breakfasts of bread, cereal, or sugary foods.

4. Eat at least five 1-cup servings of fresh vegetables each day.

Every week, try at least one new vegetable, until you are regularly eating at least two dozen different vegetables. Also experiment with new fruits and new varieties of your favorites.

5. Eat at least one serving of dark, leafy green vegetables per day.

One serving equals 1/2 cup cooked or 1 cup raw greens. Eat at least one serving of one of dark-green leafy vegetables—kale, chard, spinach, collards, mustard greens, turnip greens, bok choy, or broccoli—every day and rotate these so that you aren’t using only broccoli!

6. Replace sugar-laden desserts with fresh, frozen, or dried organic fruits and unsalted nuts.