

Nutrition and Dieting: What Are We Doing Wrong?

Everybody has goals when it comes to their health. Some want to lose weight. Others want to have more energy. Still others just want to stay healthy and “age gracefully.” The right nutrition is a great way to start doing all of this.

But scroll through your social media feed and you’ll see multiple articles about diets. One says keto is the way to go. Another expounds upon the virtues of the Mediterranean diet. Yet another tells you a vegan diet is the healthiest way to eat. Even the medical literature is contradictory! Ask 3 nutritionists or doctors what you should eat, and you’ll get 9 different opinions.

So, we pick a diet to try. And then...reality sets in. There’s so much to change about what we’re currently eating! We feel as if we’re suffering when we need to eliminate the foods we love. We eat the wrong things (everybody makes mistakes), and kick ourselves when we do. We don’t immediately feel any better, so we give up. “I’ll try a different diet next time.”

Why does this happen? What are we doing wrong?

Here are some tips to make nutritional changes more tolerable, and increase your long term success:

1. **Start small.** Instead of going from eating the typical Standard American Diet (SAD – yep, that’s what it’s called!) one day to suddenly eating nothing but brussels sprouts and kale the next, try making smaller changes. We all need the “wins” to keep us going. Start with just one thing – such as:
 - Change your Starbuck’s order from that Mocha Frappucino – which, let’s be honest, is basically a milkshake poorly disguised as a coffee drink – to a simple latte, or better yet, an iced coffee.
 - Don’t order dessert when you’re eating out.
 - Substitute extra vegetables for the rice or pasta with your dinner.
 - Get rid of the sugary foods in your home – candy, cookies, certain breakfast cereals – and replace them with healthier options. Maybe a little more complicated – but still one change that can make a tremendous difference.
2. **Don’t sweat the details.** Don’t get mired in the minutia of your chosen diet. Look at the basics of whatever diet you choose to follow – and try to do what you can to get closer to that ideal. Trying to follow a Mediterranean diet? Add more fish to your meal plan. Looking for Paleo? Give up pasta and rice to begin with. Want to go Vegan? Eliminate one or two animal-based foods from your diet for a few weeks. Once you’ve mastered the few adjustments, add more. It may take a few months, or longer, to achieve total adherence to the diet – but you’ll get there.
3. **Treats not Restrictions.** Try to think of all the things you’re not supposed to eat on a particular diet as “occasional treats” rather than “cheating”. Thinking about food in a negative way causes us to internalize (quite literally) that negativity when we eat it. Not supposed to have ice cream? Make it a treat when you visit the beach one day.

4. **Be patient.** We've all heard about the people who lost 25 pounds in a week on this diet or that one. That's not typical! Give it time.
5. **Forgive yourself!** We all make mistakes. For example, I try to follow a Paleo diet. But I have some rice occasionally, a piece of bread now and then, and I eat (ok, inhale) a decadent dessert here and there. Let it go! Consider employing the 80:20 rule – stick to the diet for 80% of the time. Relax the other 20%.

No matter which diet you've chosen – adjusting your mindset and making small changes first will help move you in the right direction and, ultimately, result in a better chance of success!