

Don't Diet

Instead, adopt these eight healthy habits.

by *Kindra Gordon*

Have you ever tried to lose weight on a diet — only to find it doesn't work, or you simply gain the weight back? That's why Zonya Foco, a registered dietitian, author and certified health and fitness instructor, says people need to lose the diet mentality. Instead, she recommends people focus on incorporating healthy habits into their daily routines.

"Being healthy requires changing your lifestyle, and that can start with changing just one thing at a time in your life," Foco says. She likes to call this mind-set *the power of one good habit*.

"Knowledge is power, and it helps us in the choices we make," she says. "There is power in one good habit at a time."

Here, Foco shares the eight relatively simple habits that she promotes for a healthy life:

Habit 1: Drink Water.

Foco points out that just one can of soda per day can double a person's chances of developing type 2 diabetes. And calorie-filled, high-sugar beverages like juice and soda can contribute to extra, unwanted weight. By replacing your daily beverages with water, Foco says you can improve your health and reduce your disease risks — including decreasing the risk of breast cancer among women.

She advocates drinking water first thing in the morning and aiming to drink an average of eight 8-ounce (oz.) glasses of water throughout the day. You can add a splash of lemon or lime juice if you like.

Habit 2: Eat breakfast.

Foco reports that studies show breakfast is an important tool to jump-start your metabolism, and people who eat breakfast tend to eat 100 fewer calories a day than people who don't.

Along with this, Foco advocates you stop evening snacking two to three hours before you go to bed. This way, you'll be hungry for

breakfast each morning, and by cutting out late-night snacks you'll shave another 200-500 calories from your day.

Habit 3: Replace sweets with fruit.

"A sweet craving is really a fruit craving. So I suggest eating fruit, which I call nature's candy," Foco says. She suggests eating a minimum of three pieces of fruit daily, which adds up to 21 servings of fruit each week.

She says keeping fruit in front of you, such as on a kitchen counter, can help encourage you and your family to grab fruit rather than sweets. And, she says if you follow the rule of thumb of eating three pieces of fruit each day, you will likely tame your sweet tooth and have fewer candy cravings. As this happens, she says, it will become easier to choose lower-sugar cereals and desserts as well.

Habit 4: Cut the fat.

This habit encourages you to choose foods that are as low in fat as possible. Foco says this means avoiding fried foods and using low-fat cooking methods. She does acknowledge that unsaturated and omega-3 fats can be beneficial, so she says nuts, olive oil and some lean meats, skim milk and low-fat cheeses can be part of your daily food choices.

Habit 5: Replace processed, chemically enhanced foods with wholesome foods.

This means choosing fresh meats, real vegetables and whole-grain breads, rice and pastas rather than white. Wholesome food means less sugar, fat, sodium and chemicals and provides more fiber and natural nutrients, Foco says.

Habit 6: Eat often.

Rather than three meals a day, Foco says eating several mini-meals during the day can help prevent you from feeling starved and then overeating. But, she says the caveat to this habit is that every time you eat, you should include a fruit or vegetable. This will help your hunger feel satisfied, without eating too many calories — and you'll also gain the healthy nutrients of the fruit or vegetable.

Foco says this habit will help ensure that you get 9 to 11 servings of fruits and vegetables daily and can help you drop 20-30 pounds (lb.) in a year.

Habit 7: Eat only until you are no longer hungry.

Foco admits this can be a tough habit to adopt, but she says it is one of the most important.

"Our culture loves us with food, but we've got to get a handle on what moderation is," she says. Foco suggests sharing meals, eating slowly so you enjoy the meal or even eating on smaller plates to help you stop eating when you begin to feel full. This tactic can help you cut 500 calories per day.

Habit 8: On occasion, it's OK to eat outside the guidelines of the other seven habits.

How can this be? Foco explains that as you follow the other habits for eating healthy, your body's metabolism will likely slow down because you are consuming fewer calories. Thus, to keep your metabolism burning calories at the appropriate rate, an occasional indulgence will keep your body on track. And, Foco says, it eliminates that diet mentality that you must deprive yourself of an occasional treat.

Lastly, Foco acknowledges that regular exercise is also an important part of a healthy lifestyle, but she says these eight healthy habits are a good starting point to changing your life.

"It's really about remembering the basics of good nutrition," she says. "The power of one good habit is amazing."

Foco has authored the cookbook *Lickety-Split Meals for Health Conscious People on the Go!* and she has a syndicated TV show, *Zonya's Health Bites*. She and Stephen Moss have co-authored the health novel *Water with Lemon*, which incorporates these eight habits into an inspiring fictional story. For more information visit www.zonya.com.

