

Nutritious Eating is Enjoyable, Not Restricting

by Crystal Witte, RDN

Happy 2023, and welcome to “The Nutrition Corner”! Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Crystal Witte, and I am a fellow runner and PTC member. Virginia Tech is my alma mater (B.S. in Human Nutrition, Foods and Exercise), and I completed my dietetic internship with the University of Delaware. In 2011, I became a credentialed Registered Dietitian Nutritionist through the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. I am passionate about helping people achieve the healthiest version of themselves through sensible, enjoyable lifestyle choices! Throughout 2023, I will be writing a nutrition series entitled “8 Key Characteristics of Nutritious Eating” for each PTC newsletter publication. This is my first entry of this 8-part series. I hope you enjoy reading!

January often motivates people to pledge themselves to a healthier way of life in the year ahead. Not surprisingly, weight loss tops one of the most popular New Year’s resolutions, and the diet industry lures many Americans into believing that starting a diet will result in a slimmer waistline. However, as a nutrition professional, I do not encourage or promote weight loss diets for several reasons, including:

1. Dieting is the #1 predictor of weight regain! Yes, you read that correctly. Going on a diet to lose weight is a strong predictor that the dieter will gain more weight. When a person restricts food to create a calorie deficit (a calorie is the unit of energy measurement in food) to initiate weight loss, the body’s metabolism slows down to adjust for the new, low level of energy intake. The body thinks it’s in a famine and will compensate to preserve its daily bodily functioning for survival. As a result of dieting, the body’s daily metabolic processes (including neurological functioning, heart rate, hormone synthesis, digestion, organ preservation, and more) slow down and require less energy than before the diet

was started. This means fewer calories are required for the body to perform the same daily operations, which means less food is required for survival. As a result, when the person stops the diet and starts eating more food, weight gain results because the person’s basal metabolic rate has been lowered as a result of the diet. The more diets a person has been on, the more weight the person will gain over time because dieting slows the metabolism.

Numerous scientific studies further prove that dieting is absurd and counter-productive. A team of UCLA researchers reviewed 31 long-term studies on dieting and concluded that dieting is *a consistent predictor of weight gain*—up to 2/3 of the people regained more weight than they initially lost with the diet (Mann et al. 2007).

2. Going on a diet undermines trust in a person’s ability to make his or her own choices on when, what, and how much to eat. When a person has a list of “food rules” to follow regarding foods to eat, foods to avoid, and conditional circumstances on when and how much to eat, the basic process of fueling the body becomes very complicated and less enjoyable. The

truth is that each person possesses the intuitive ability to discern how to fuel his or her body appropriately. Unfortunately, the more diets a person has been on, the further removed the person is from being able to appropriately implement this instinctive ability. The good news is that this basic intuition can be restored over time by working with a healthcare advocate skilled in the science-based approach of Intuitive Eating.

3. Another disadvantage of dieting is that it increases a person’s preoccupation with food in that more of a person’s thought life is consumed with thoughts about eating. If a person has a basic biological need that is not met, the region of the brain responsible for that bodily process will be heightened. For example, if you knew that you could only urinate between 11 AM and 5 PM every day, it would be reasonable to expect that your urgency to use the bathroom during the hours of 6 PM and 10 AM would be heightened because you know that urinating would be off limits during those hours. The same is true for the basic body process of eating.

4. Dieting introduces a false morality around eating. Almost all diets provide a list of “good” or “clean” foods to

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eat, and “bad” or “dirty” foods to avoid. When a person strays off the diet list and eats a food that is off-limits (according to the diet plan), this leaves a person feeling guilty for “breaking” the diet. A person is not “good” or “bad” based upon his or her food choices.

The truth is that nutritious eating is enjoyable, not restricting. Nutritious eating should support a person’s activities of daily life, instead of a person’s life revolving around a diet. Be aware of eating plans that restrict or significantly limit carbohydrates or dietary fat (ketogenic diet, Adkins, Ornish diet, etc.), prescribe ways

of eating that restrict entire foods groups or categories/types of whole food (Paleo diet, strict veganism, etc.), or implement conditional rules of when a person is “allowed” to eat (intermittent fasting, calorie counting, etc.).

“Weight loss” diets are temporary, since the numerous food rules are impossible to sustain for a prolonged period of time. Instead of going on a diet, a more practical approach to improving your nutrition intake to enhance overall wellness could be to focus on changing one habit at a time until the change has become a natural part of your daily lifestyle. Gradual, realistic changes are more sustainable

over time than a hardcore, temporary quick-fix. Also, this approach yields better outcomes because it places you in charge of the changes you make instead of being “told” what to do by a fabricated diet plan. Yes, nutritious eating is enjoyable, not restricting!

Sources:

Mann, T. (2007). Medicare’s search for effective obesity treatments: Diets are not the answer. *American Psychologist* 62(3): 220-233.

Tribole, E., Resch, E. (2020). *Intuitive Eating, Fourth Edition*. St. Martin’s Publishing Group. New York, NY.

PUMPKIN LIMA BEAN SOUP

Do you have extra canned pumpkin on hand from the holidays? If so, don’t wait until next season; go ahead and use it in this delicious recipe!

Ingredients:

- 8 oz. dried, small-sized lima beans (pre-soaked)
- 1 cup chopped celery (about 3 medium stalks or 2 extra-large stalks)
- 1.5 cups chopped green stems of green onion
- 2 cups diced yellow potatoes
- 3 cups fresh French green beans or Haricot Verts, chopped into 1-inch pieces
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper
- 1/8 tsp. cayenne pepper
- 1/2 tsp. dried rosemary
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 2 tsp. ground turmeric
- 2 tbsp. dried chives
- 3 cups water (use hot water if you want it to expedite the cooking time)
- 15-oz. can 100% pumpkin
- 12 oz. (about 2.5 cups) cubed preservative-free lean ham or Canadian bacon
- 2 tbsp. extra virgin olive oil

Directions:

Soak lima beans in large bowl or Crockpot® at least 8 hours (or up to 24 hours) in water, with at least 3 inches of water above the dried lima beans.

After soaking 8–24 hours, drain the lima beans in a colander/strainer and rinse with water. Discard the soaking water.

Rinse Crockpot and add the first 11 ingredients; cook on high for 3 hours. Go ahead and

cut the ham or Canadian bacon into bite-sized cubes and store in an air-tight container in the fridge. If desired, you may rinse the cubed ham in a colander under cool water to reduce the sodium content.

After 3 hours of cooking, reduce Crockpot setting to low and add canned pumpkin, olive oil, and ham/Canadian bacon.

Cook for 1 more hour on low.

Serve soup with whole grain bread, rice crackers, or Versatile Pumpkin Muffins (this recipe will be in the next issue of the PTC newsletter!).

Chef’s notes:

On the Peninsula, lima beans are sold at most Kroger grocery stores.

Be sure to use plain canned pumpkin (no other added ingredients), not pumpkin pie mix with added sugar and spices.

I used Wellshire Black Forest uncured ham steak, sold at Whole Foods. Trader Joe’s also sells a couple of nitrite-free ham or Canadian bacon options.

Try doubling the recipe and freezing half in an air-tight food storage container for an extra time-saving bonus! The textural integrity of the soup is maintained if the soup is defrosted in the fridge overnight before reheating (instead of heating from a frozen state).

Why it works:

This is a complete meal in one dish: the lima beans, vegetables, and canned pumpkin provide fiber-rich carbohydrates; the ham and lima beans are a good source of protein; and olive oil provides heart-healthy monounsaturated fat. Also, lima beans are a good source of iron. Potatoes and pumpkin are a rich source of potassium. Pork is a good source of vitamin B1, which is an important nutrient for energy production.

