

Nutritious Eating is Realistic for Your Life

In the first installment of this 8-part article series titled, “8 Key Characteristics of Nutritious Eating”, we learned that nutritious eating is enjoyable, not restricting, and how weight loss diets are not successful in the long run (pun intended!). In this sequel, I am looking forward to sharing the next key characteristic of nutritious eating with you!

There is no denying that nutrition affects many different aspects of health and daily well-being, including: energy, sleep quality, mental focus, cardiovascular functioning, blood sugar regulation, digestion/elimination, body composition, and more. Perhaps you would like to improve one of these areas of your health, and you realize that making dietary modifications could improve your wellness in a meaningful way, but you aren't sure about the most effective approach. Some “health experts” or well-meaning doctors may tell you to cut out all sources of certain types of foods, or your friend may implore you to try a juice fast of only fruits and vegetables, or you may be considering having all

of your meals delivered to your home so you don't have to figure it out yourself. The truth is that achieving better health through improved nutrition does not have to be complicated or life-altering. Rather, nutritious eating is realistic for your life. In other words, nutritious eating should complement and support your lifestyle in a manner that you can sustain over time. Below are three straightforward steps on how to successfully improve your nutrition status in a sensible way for better outcomes, long term:

1. Identify your current dilemma you would like to improve, and brainstorm a realistic, nutrition-related intervention to implement.

For example, perhaps you've noticed a recurring trend that you tend to overeat at dinnertime and you would like to change this so you don't experience indigestion in the evening, and you sleep more soundly at night. Upon reflection of your daily routine, you recognize that your morning and daytime nutrition is insufficient, naturally leaving you feeling overly hungry at dinnertime. As a result, you decide to give your breakfast a nutrition boost by adding two hard-boiled eggs to your standard bowl of cereal in the morning, and include an easy, grab-and-go mid-afternoon snack of nuts, a piece of fruit, and some cottage cheese because this change seems appealing and sensible to you.

VERSATILE PUMPKIN MUFFINS

Recipe adapted by Crystal Witte, RDN

This recipe pairs well with last month's recipe, Pumpkin Lima Bean Soup. You can use this recipe as an alternative for cornbread muffins to pair with a savory dish. You can also serve the muffins as a sweet treat by topping them with some warm apple butter, applesauce, a dollop of fruit preserves, or a drizzle of honey or maple syrup. These muffins are easily digestible; they can be eaten prior a workout without digestive distress. For a satisfying, mid-afternoon snack, pair a muffin or two with a piece of fruit and some cottage cheese to curb your appetite until dinner. This recipe is easy-to-make, and is a good source of dietary fiber from the oat flour and pumpkin, and provides vitamin A from the pumpkin. You can double the recipe and freeze half of the muffins in an air-tight food storage container to save time. The muffins taste best heated up in the microwave for about 15-20 seconds before eating.

Ingredients:

- 2.5 cups oat flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 15-ounce can 100% pumpkin
- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 cup 100% orange juice

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F and line 12 muffin cups with some olive oil.
2. Mix the first 3 ingredients in a large mixing bowl. Add the remaining 3 ingredients stir until clumps are removed.

3. Fill 12 muffin cups with batter and bake for about 35 minutes, or until muffin tops are lightly browned. Allow muffins to cool before removing from tins.

4. Store muffins in an air-tight food storage container in the fridge or freezer.

Baker's notes:

1. Easily make your own oat flour by grinding rolled oats in a quality blender, such as a Vitamix. If desired, the recipe can be made gluten-free by simply using gluten-free rolled oats to grind into oat flour. Alternatively, you can purchase gluten-free oat flour by Bob's Red Mill at Kroger, The Fresh Market, or Harris Teeter, or you can purchase online from Vitacost.com, Amazon, or other online retailers.
2. Be sure to use plain canned pumpkin, not pumpkin pie mix with added sugar and spices. Canned pumpkin is usually sold in the baking aisle in most grocery stores.
3. Feel free to swap out the olive oil for other baking-approved oils, such as: avocado, sunflower, or coconut oils, although the taste may be slightly altered.
4. If desired, you may swap out the orange juice for almond milk, but the muffins won't have a subtle tart flavor from the orange juice.



Original recipe from Very Vegan Val:
<https://veryveganval.com/2017/06/11/savory-pumpkin-muffins/>

2. Experiment with your selected intervention and reflect. It can be helpful to refer to your new intervention as an “experiment” for a designated amount of time. This allows yourself the opportunity to try the new change as a trial to ensure the change dovetails with your life demands and complements your personal health goal. Returning to the scenario above, after purchasing the hard-boiled eggs, nuts, fruit, and cottage cheese at the grocery store, you’re ready to implement your experiment for the next 1–2 weeks! At the end of the trial, assess if the intervention helped pacify the problem, and reflect on the obstacles you encountered with implementing your newfound change. For example, did the intervention help stabilize your blood sugar later in the day, preventing extreme hunger going into dinner? Was the intervention realistic to sustain for your lifestyle? If not, what modification(s) would need to be made in order for this to be improved upon?

3. Establish and reinforce the revised change until it becomes a natural part of your daily lifestyle. Simple, realistic interventions are easier to sustain than difficult changes. It is thought that easier changes may take about a month or two of intentional follow-through before becoming a natural habit, whereas intricate changes require more time to master, possibly up to eight months or longer. The good news is research indicates that “messing up” from time to time does not mean that you won’t eventually master your desired habit (Lally et al. 2009). Don’t expect perfection, give yourself grace when you “fall short,” and remain intentional on not giving up on establishing your newfound change as a habit!

Implementing enhanced nutrition to feel better does not have to be a complex or arduous process. Here are some examples of practical ideas that can yield profound health dividends, when integrated into your life over time:

- > Replace your daily diet soda or nightly glass of wine for an extra glass of pure water instead. This simple swap can result in a leaner body composition and even reduce the risk of developing certain chronic diseases! According to WebMD.com, consuming artificial sweeteners can increase a person’s risk of developing type 2 diabetes and cancer, and they can also stimulate the appetite. Likewise, even drinking one glass of alcohol per day can modestly increase a person’s risk for developing certain types of cancer, according to the National Cancer Institute. Alcohol can also stimulate a person’s appetite, making it easier to consume additional calories than normal. You may also be interested to know that calories consumed from alcoholic beverages are more readily converted into body fat, as opposed to calories from complex carbohydrates, protein, or dietary fat.
- > Turn off electronics during mealtime to be more connected with the eating experience and to socialize with those around you. Limiting distractions while eating better connects you with your appetite signals regarding emerging fullness cues from your brain and stomach, helping to prevent overeating. Also, social engagement with your family and friends helps support better connection and healthier relationships.

- > Replace your afternoon snack of chips with a handful of nuts instead. Nuts are convenient (no utensils required), portable, and they are a natural source of vitamin E, fiber, and some protein. Plus, the heart-healthy dietary fat from nuts helps satisfy a mid-afternoon appetite better than chips.
- > Go to bed 30 minutes earlier each night and wake up 30 minutes earlier the next morning to allow time for a nutritious, well-rounded breakfast. If this is not feasible, could you pack a food-based protein smoothie to sip on during your morning commute as an alternative? Breakfast eaters have better appetite regulation later in the day that those who skip breakfast. Studies show that long-term breakfast skippers have a higher percentage of body fat than breakfast eaters, and that weight loss is easier to attain in those who commit to eating breakfast daily. An added benefit is that regular breakfast eaters tend to have lower triglyceride levels compared to those who routinely skip breakfast (Kerksick et al. 2017).
- > Plan time on the weekends to grocery shop and meal prep for the week ahead. Also, when cooking, easily double or triple the recipe and freeze leftovers! It’s easier to stick with a wholesome way of eating when the food is prepared ahead of time.

Regardless of the intervention, focus on changing one habit at a time until the change has become a natural part of your daily lifestyle. This method will help ensure that your well-meaning intentions stick long term, and that your enhanced nutrition is realistic and sustainable for your life!

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