

5 Eating Habits That Will Trim You Up

We have an excuse for every poor choice we make today: “I had bad parents;” “No one told me the truth;” or “It’s just the way I am.”

The sad fact is we think it will justify our actions. But when it comes to our choices at mealtime, we are finding it’s more about harboring bad habits than an inherited or environmentally stimulated bad behavior.

True, we can inherit poor eating behaviors from our parents or past eating patterns, but we have so many options today to eat healthy. If we want to change where we are going, it starts with the choices we make today. I know there are conflicting words of advice everywhere you turn, and knowing what to do can be complicated. So here is an offering of simple tips to help you make positive health choices.

1. Start eating at the dinner table. Our tendency today is to eat on the run, on the couch, or out of a bag. The result is we eat more. Why? Because we are eating whatever is convenient, eating larger amounts, and sometimes we eat directly out of the pots—no portion restrictions—it’s a free-for-all!

If you take the time to sit at the table, you are more conscious of your portions. You can unwind with the family, not race to get done. Go over the events of the day, and if you like, you’ll have the opportunity to put on some background music to make it a more relaxing enjoyable time.

2. Exchange lunch plates for dinner plates. This is one I have used many times. When you use a smaller plate, your eyes see more food—it’s true! If our eyes *are* bigger than our stomachs, why not fool them? I was brought up with the mindset that you

eat everything on your plate because someone somewhere is starving. This led me to eat past the full line, and the result was more calories than I required. So today I use smaller plates and feel full, not stuffed.

3. Slow down the pace. Do you find yourself eating just to get something in your stomach? More than likely you eat fast because eating has become a function, not an experience. I can hear it now, "Linda, my life is too hectic for me to experience my food!" Granted, we do live fast-paced lives, but it's the fast-paced eating that is driving us to an early grave.

When we choose to take 15 to 20 minutes to eat a meal, we find ourselves satisfied with less food. Setting your fork down between bites while you savor the flavor of your meal will allow your mind to catch up with your stomach, and the full sensation will be recognized earlier. Taking the time to actually chew your food instead of inhaling it will help in the process as well.

I am the worst at eating for function instead of experience. But I have found that over the years, if I actually think about what I'm eating (not in an obsessive way) and relax as I do it, the digestion process is enhanced as well. Nothing causes an upset stomach like gulping down food on the run.

I guess this means we need to make time, not just take time, to eat. What a concept! Even if you are one of those who chooses to eat smaller meals six times a day, slow down and enjoy it.

4. Palms up for portion size. If you set everything in place but choose to pile on the food, you miss the boat altogether. Portion size is the key, and the easiest way to know where to begin and end is to look at your own palm. Opened-faced minus the fingers, this is your portion. Whether we are talking meat, veggies, or bread, this concept will keep us in the

ballpark of proper portion size.

Once again, make it fun! When your children are filling their plates (the younger you can get them started the better—of course, use common sense here), remind them to look at their palms and see how close they can get to measuring a portion. Keep in mind that as your children are growing, you don't want to limit their diets as you do adults.

You can use the Palms Up Method with your family and encourage them to place color variety on their plates as well—veggies, salads, lean meats, pastas, sweet potatoes, and, yes, macaroni and cheese even has a place at this setting. Look for balance.

5. Out of sight, out of mind. The final step is to remove the temptation of foods that cause you to binge. As the adult, you are in control of what is available in your home for your family to eat. Slowly start to substitute good choices for not-so-healthy ones. Keep fresh fruits and vegetables in the refrigerator. Replace your white bread with one containing whole grains. Limit the amount of salt, sugar, caffeine and alcohol you have on hand.

Encourage healthy living with your younger set by allowing them to help you purge the pantry. Go through things you eat on a regular basis and check the label. If the first ingredient is sugar—out it goes! This might be too shocking to the “family system,” so take it slow; start with one or two items at first. Purge and then replace with something healthy. Let the kids choose the healthy items. If they are part of the process, they will be more likely to embrace the change.

Small steps to a healthier you are easily accomplished if you keep your eye on the source of your strength. I constantly pull on the sleeve of my Savior Jesus Christ for discernment and direction; He is one guest you should always invite to your table. Happy eating!

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