

# 20 ways to eat healthier right now

Adopt one (or all) of these simple strategies to drop pounds and feel great!

By Marisa Cohen

**R**emember when you were a kid and eating was as simple as “Open, chew, enjoy”? You didn’t count the grams of fiber and fat in your PB&J. You munched when you were hungry, stopped when you were full and ran off to play with your Cabbage Patch Kids. But choosing a meal as a health-minded adult can be as complicated and joyless as a calculus final. Enough! Here are 20 commonsense rules that make eating right as easy as pie for you and your inner 8-year-old.

**1 Eat like a tourist in Greece.** The sunset over your office park isn’t as stunning as the one over an Aegean beach, but a plate of grilled fish and fresh vegetables and a glass of wine is as delicious in Athens, Georgia, as it is in Athens, Greece. Plus, a Mediterranean menu can help lower your risk for heart disease and keep you slim, says Susan Mitchell, Ph.D., coauthor of *Fat Is Not Your Fate* ( Fireside).

**2 If you can’t grow it, don’t eat it.**

A potato comes from the ground, an egg from a hen. But where did that Pop-tart come from? If your best guess is “aisle 7,” pass it up. “Unprocessed, whole foods will give you the most benefits,” says Michelle K. Berman, R.D., of Fairfax, Virginia. Processing takes out nutrients such as antioxidants and fiber, and even when chemists add them back, nothing stacks up to Mother Nature.

**3 Read the back of the box first.**

“The front is all advertising,” Berman says. Flip it around for the real story. The more ingredients, the more likely it has visited a few processing plants where something artificial was mixed in, says Lydia Zepeda, Ph.D., professor of consumer science at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

**4 The crunchier, the better.** Snacks that offer a big, satisfying crunch when you bite into them—we mean apples, celery, snap peas and nuts, not chips—keep your mouth busy longer than food you slurp. “The more you chew, the slower you eat and the more time your body has to register fullness,” Mitchell says.

**5 You can always have more. Tomorrow.**

A food shortage is not imminent. Besides, anything you eat after you’re full doesn’t even taste as good. “There is a toning down

It’s Greek to you! Mediterranean meals can help heart and hips.



of taste buds after the first few bites,” says Linda Bacon, Ph.D., professor of nutrition at City College of San Francisco. And no one loves feeling stuffed.

**6 A frozen berry beats a fresh doughnut.**

Purchasing organic local produce is better for both the environment and your health, but when the nearest farm is hours away, don’t default to a package of Oreos. “Frozen, canned and fresh fruit all have comparable amounts of nutrients,” says Christine M. Bruhm, Ph.D., director of the Center for Consumer Research at the University of California at Davis.

**7 You can’t replace real ice cream.**

When you’re craving Chunky Monkey, no amount of fat-free ice treat will make up for it. “Diet foods leave you feeling hungry and cheated,” says Paul McKenna, Ph.D., author of *I Can Make You Thin* (Sterling). Splurge on one scoop of the real deal and savor it. “You’ll be satisfied physically and psychologically,” McKenna says.

**8 There’s no fruit in “fruit flavor.”**

Seeing *flavor* on a label is a sign the food was stripped of its real taste and a fabricated one swapped in, Bacon says. *Natural* only means the additive came from a plant or an animal, which may not be as healthy as it sounds. “Scientists create flavors using bacteria and call them ‘natural,’” she says. Would you buy Bacteri-Os?



CATHRINE WESSEL. STILL LIVES. FROM LEFT: BRIAN HAGIWARA/FOODPIX/JUPITERIMAGES, DOUGLAS JOHNS STUDIO/STOCKFOOD.

# selfDIET EXTRA

**9 If it's not around, you can't eat it.** You're in your cozy armchair watching *Gossip Girl* when you get an urge for Cool Ranch Doritos. If all you have to do is walk to your pantry, you'll grab a bag and attack it. But let's say you must put on your shoes, find your keys and drive to the store. Laziness will triumph. (Yes, sometimes sloth is a good thing!)

**10 Table your meals.** As much sitting as we do, we rarely stay put during dinner. Fifty-nine percent of young women eat on the run, a study in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* finds, and on-the-go eaters consume more total fat, as well as more soda and fast food. The less distracted and stressed you are when you dine, the more efficiently your body absorbs nutrients. Turn off the tube, step away from your desk and park the car before you dig in.



**11 Judge food by its cover.** When you have to hack through layers of packaging and plastic to get to your dinner, it's likely to be unhealthy, Zepeda says. Plus, research indicates that perfluorochemicals in food containers may lower fertility. Companies aren't phasing out PFCs until 2015! So do it yourself now.

**12 Cake's just not that into you.** Sugary carbs are the bad boyfriends of the food world. They woo us with sweet nothings and leave us unsatisfied, guilt-ridden and 10 pounds heavier. The solution: Pick a snack that has your back, such as fruit, lowfat yogurt and honey. The occasional hookup with a sexy old fling is fine (hello, red velvet!), but most splurges should have your health in mind.



**13 Don't drink dessert.** Brimming with vitamins! Bursting with energy! Store shelves are exploding with colorful, cleverly named drinks that sound healthy but are actually just sweetened water. Don't let the labels fool you, Berman says. If it's not skim milk, plain H<sub>2</sub>O or regular coffee or tea, it's a treat. For a healthier sip, try lemon or mint iced tea or sparkling water with a splash of juice.

**14 Make sure you can ID the animal.** You don't have to hunt and skin your supper, but if your chicken has been molded into a nugget, who knows what you're really chewing. And when you choose meat that's been processed into sausage, strips or slices, you're downing sodium and preservatives instead of healthy nutrients, says Adam Drewnowski, Ph.D., director of the nutritional sciences program at the University of Washington at Seattle. Stick to unfussed-with cuts straight from the butcher.

**15 Fuel up in the morning, not at night.** A car needs gas when it's hitting the road, not when it's sitting in the garage—so why do we have our biggest meal when the only energy burner on the agenda is working the remote? Instead, aim for a 550-calorie breakfast, a 500-calorie lunch, a 450-calorie dinner and a 100-calorie snack. "If you overeat at night, you're less likely to burn off the calories," Mitchell says.

**16 Don't buy food where you buy tires.** In our time-crunched life, it's tempting to grab groceries at the pump or in a store where you can get a giant box of cereal along with an ottoman. But for the healthiest food at the fairest price, visit the neighborhood grocery store. A study in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* found that convenience stores charge more for nutritious fare than supermarkets do.

**17 Work for your dinner.** Sure, you could inhale supper straight out of a bucket, but for a healthy meal, you need to invest at least a few minutes in chopping, rinsing or grilling. The result is worth the effort, Mitchell says. "When you prepare dishes yourself, you can see exactly which ingredients are going into it and make conscious choices about what you truly want to eat," she says.



**18 Your hips are not a fridge.** Once you slice and sauté your way to a fabulous feast, you don't have to finish every bite. "We're conditioned to think that if we don't devour everything on our plate, we are misbehaving," McKenna says. But if you keep munching even after you're full, you are using your body as a storage unit. If there's enough left over for lunch tomorrow, pack it up and put it in the fridge. Otherwise, toss scraps in the trash. We promise we won't tell your mom.

**19 Watching *Top Chef* isn't cooking.** We love food shows, too, but zoning out in front of the TV with a container of greasy moo shu pork is kind of missing the point. "Cooking has become a spectator sport," Drewnowski says. "People watch and think, 'If only that chef could come cook for me!'" No need to whip up a seven-course meal, but you can pick up tips about combining flavors and using fresh ingredients.

**20 Cut yourself a break!** If you follow these rules most of the time but occasionally crave a fast food fix, a slice of pizza or a brownie, go for it. You can happily resume your healthy plan once you satisfy the urge. "We all have to relax a bit," Drewnowski says. "If you want fried chicken now and then, enjoy it!" ■



ARTHUR BELEBEAU; STYLING, LIDA MOORE MUSSO; HAIR, MICHAEL KANYON FOR REDKEN; MAKEUP, DANIELLE DECKER FOR DIOR; PROP STYLING, CHARLOTTE MALMLOF, STILL LIFES; CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: DOUGLAS JOHNS STUDIO/STOCKFODD, CNP ARCHIVE, INFOCUS/ALAMY.