

## Simple Ways to Improve your Nutrition

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Nutrition can be a very confusing topic. From the multitude of quick fix diets to the conflicting information we hear – it's hard to know just what to believe! Whenever you find yourself confused, remind yourself that food is fuel and that ultimately you are attempting to fuel your engine.

Here are 5 simple ways to get back to the basics and fuel your engine:

### 1. Eat Breakfast – and then every 3-4 hours after waking

Turns out your Mom was right - it's really important to start the day out with a healthy balanced breakfast. While we sleep our body's systems slow down and go into a fasting mode. If we don't break that fast upon waking, our systems fail to work as optimally as possible, and struggle to provide us with the energy and vigour we need. Make sure breakfast (and all meals) contain at least 3 of the 4 food groups – Grain Products, Vegetables and Fruit, Milk Products, Meats and Alternatives. This will give you a great start to any day!

### 2. Drink Water

Our bodies consist of approximately 65% water. Water is a key component in our brain and muscle tissue and is a key component of our blood plasma which helps nutrients and toxins travel in and out of our bodies. Despite the importance of water, some reports indicate that up to 75% of us are chronically dehydrated. The impact of this dehydration ranges from difficulties with constipation, dry skin and thirst with mild dehydration, to headaches, slowed metabolism, poor short term memory, fatigue and an inability to focus, with just moderate dehydration.

The amount of water required to maintain proper hydration is different for everyone. The more fruits, vegetables, juices and milk you have in your diet, the less water you will need to drink. The best way to tell if you're properly hydrated is to check the colour of your urine – pale colour means you're hydrated. But a good rule of thumb is to drink a minimum of 8 glasses of water every day. If you exercise, drink coffee or other caffeinated beverages, spend your day in hot or cold environments, or if you are pregnant or nursing you need to increase that amount. Remember, if you are experiencing thirst, you are already dehydrated, so drink up!

The challenge is to drink a minimum of 8 glasses per day every day for the next month. Are you up for the challenge? Try it on and see how you feel.

### 3. Choose healthy snacks

Snacks are a great way to keep our blood glucose levels consistent and our energy levels up between meals. Healthy snacking involves a little bit of planning, but can make a tremendous difference in the way you feel. Here are a few things to consider when choosing snacks:

- Watch for 'additives' – all these convenience items are just that – convenient, however with convenience does come sacrifice, and usually that means preservatives. Consider that if a food doesn't go bad sitting on your counter or in your cupboard for over one year that there may be a lot of unwanted additives in that food product.
- 2 food groups per snack – to make sure that your snacks are balanced and will provide you with long term energy, make sure you have 2 of

the 4 food groups in your snacks. Ex. Yogurt and Fruit, All Bran Bar and a glass of milk, Veggies and Hummus, Apple and Cheese, etc.

#### 4. Watch your portion sizes

Unfortunately we live in a culture where everything is 'super-sized' – and while this may feel like more value for your hard earned dollar, it generally results in poor nutrition and over eating. Remember that we need to fuel our engines for the activities we do. If you are generally quite sedentary then consider that your portion and fuel needs are considerably less than that of a marathon runner. Review Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating for more information about your required servings ([http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/basics-base/index\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/basics-base/index_e.html))

Here are a few simple guidelines with regards to portion sizes:

- Grains: Slice of Bread (CD Case), ½ Bagel (hockey Puck), ½ C Pasta or Rice (small cupcake wrapper), 1 pancake (CD)
- Meat and Alternatives: 50-100g Meat (a deck of cards or a computer mouse), 2T Peanut Butter (1 golf ball), 60 ml of nuts (2 shot glasses), ½ -1C Beans or Lentils (light bulb), 50-100g Fish (cheque book)
- Fruit and Vegetables: ¼ C Dried Fruit (1 large egg), ½ C Juice (1/2 Tetra pack), 1C Salad (1 softball), 1 medium fruit or Vegetable (1 tennis ball)
- Milk Products: ¾ C Yogurt (single serving yogurts), 1.5oz Firm Cheese (2 dice)

#### 5. 80/20 rule

We also have to enjoy this thing called 'life' – so abide by the 80/20 rule. 80% of the time - eat well balanced, properly portioned meals and snacks that follow the Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. 20% of the time, allow yourself the freedom to enjoy food and the pleasures that come with it. Savour dark chocolate, relish a glass of red wine, delight in your favourite holiday meal – share these experiences with friends and family and appreciate the social nature of sharing a meal.

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